

喬林 知

TOMO TAKABAYASHI

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仮の姿!

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角川ビーンズ文庫

Kyou Kara Maou - Side Story 1

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Novel Illustrations

Prologue



Prologue

There are four things in this world that must never be touched.

This castle has been broken.

And the bloodline of our family will also break here.

Watching the wounded soldiers stretch out two bodies, the man who was until just now the king of this city and country, sighs thus.

In this room highest up in the tower, there's a mixture of the ministers fighting to the very end, and enemy soldiers here to invade them, making the situation so chaotic it's hard to tell which side the blood and the bodies belong to.

Stepping on the blood and bodies of both sides, the invader stands straight, and immediately snaps when he sees what his subordinates are carrying,

“Who asked you to kill them? Didn't I say to bring them to me alive?”

The ones lowered onto the cold stone floor together with the stretcher, are the cold corpses that were once the royal consort and the prince.

Since her body is tightly curled up to protect the baby in her arms, so they can't see the expression of pain that should be on her face. Her previously beautiful honey-colored hair is stained with blood, plastered to her snow-white skin. Maybe it's because she had plunged a short sword into her chest, the still-fresh blood has dyed a large part of the clothes on her back red.

“But Your Excellency Englas, by the time we discovered them they were...”

“It's meaningless if they're not alive!”

That's right, if it's not alive, it's meaningless.

Held up by four strong soldiers, Robert Belal mutters to himself.

He never told them to kill themselves.

No matter how barbaric the clan, they wouldn't actually hurt women and children. Although he couldn't protect them to the end, but to ensure that his wife and young son survives, he had spent a lot of effort convincing them to leave the castle. And still, why did they act so rashly?

Robert calls their names in his rough voice, struggling and trying to break free

from the soldiers, so he can touch his beloved family.

His newborn son is in his wife's arms, so they can't see the hair color and pale brown eyes he inherited from his father. All they can see is his skinny limbs sticking out from his mother's embrace, cold and white, like a statue made of wax.

"When we found them on the north bank of the lake, they were long dead. If we were just a little later, their bodies would have sunk into the depths, never to be found."

There's a giant lake right underneath the tower north of the castle. Should anything sink into this lake, which is cold in summer but doesn't freeze in winter, finding it would be impossible. The consort's aim was to kill herself together the prince, wasn't it? Rather than watch her country waste away in the hands of foreigners, and live her life in sorrow, it would be better to sleep forever in the icy cold depths.

If he was by their side, they wouldn't choose this path of no return.

Robert moves his gaze away from the bodies, swearing at the invaders. But strangely he doesn't lose himself in grief, because he feels that he'll be able to apologize to the mother and son very soon.

Because he too will soon die in the same place, so they won't have to wait long.

The huge and burly man called Englar caresses his red-brown mustache as he frets. This man had gathered the Shimaron people, representing the power of the east, and made them into troops to invade other countries, controlling everything with violence.

"At first I thought that if I threatened you with your wife's life, you would definitely obey everything I say... Now I have to find other sacrifices, but what else can make this man surrender..."

"No matter what dirty tricks you use..."

Robert Belal says, gritting his teeth. The soldiers holding his limbs, are shocked by his next expression into loosening their grips. Because this king is laughing, he's laughing at the Shimaron soldiers.

Right now, he doesn't have the time to sink into shame and despair.

"The day you desire will never arrive, no one will be loyal to you Shimarons with no country, and no pride. Since Robert Belal's son, Peg Belal is dead, my family bloodline dies here too. Your wish will never be fulfilled!"

This king of the fallen country, yells with the power to push aside the soldiers holding him,

"If you can open it, then go ahead and try! The next time the 'Box' without a Key is unsealed, forget the name, everything you got will be destroyed by that uncontrollable power! And one of the four Keys that can open the 'Boxes', will disappear together with my son's and my death, never to fall into the hands of evil!"

If he wants world peace, it would probably be best to let the Key vanish. Robert looks at his son's tiny, motionless hand. On his little arm, there isn't the mark of inheritance.

This world doesn't need keys, maybe this is God's will.

The king thinks it over, and shakes his head.

There aren't any gods in this world, if there are, then a newly-born, pure and innocent baby would not face such a cruel fate.

The old Shimaron soldier with the highest rank, murmurs into the red-brown-bearded leader's ear,

"Your Excellency, our army's influence is spreading very smoothly, we just received the report that Samaluje has fallen to us too. After Laxi, I think it's a matter of time before Gillesby falls into our hands. Even Belal is now our prisoner..."

The old soldier glances at those pale brown eyes with the silver irises, and is suddenly lost for words, his confidence visibly shaken. But then he immediately refutes the unease in his heart, and continues talking to his boss,

"I think that by tomorrow, even Robert Belal's men will support you as king, so now there's no reason to bother about the 'Box' any more. Even without that thing, our army will rule this continent."

“So?”

“In that man’s body... there really exists the Key. His wife and child are already dead, so now it won’t be easy to threaten him into obedience. If we continue harping on the matter of the Box, it will just create an opportunity for other countries. Right now we shouldn’t let the other countries have time to gather their forces, instead we should conquer the entire continent in the one fell swoop to...”

“You mean you want to give up?”

Englar pushes aside the old soldier’s shoulder, yelling in a voice so loud all the soldiers in the tower want to stuff their ears. In his fury, his eyes are bloodshot, his tightly-gripped fist shaking.

“Are you telling me to give up? Telling me, the hero who discovered the legendary weapon, to give up!”

Robert thinks, ‘This guy is possessed. I must never let this man open ‘that’.’

“It took so long for my soldiers to find ‘End of the Wind’, and back then it was my soldiers who found it, so it belongs to me. That is the legendary Box, that is said to release mad gales strong enough to destroy the world when released. The soldiers should have sent it here by now. Today... that is, right now, I have the power to destroy the world, I can finally end this world with my own hands. If so, why the hell would I give up? What reason do I have to let go of that power!”

Looks like one of the four Boxes, ‘End of the Wind’, has already been found by them.

Robert Belal gives the howling man a look of pity, thinking back to the memories passed down in their family for generations.

Long ago, powerful heroes had waged a war with the Creators who wanted to destroy the world. They put everything on the line, and even committed despicable acts, to seal the Creators into a place where they can’t escape, and the guards to that place are the four Boxes. The Boxes were kept in different places separately, and the Key treated as a symbol of warning, kept in the bodies of each clan leader, to be passed down through the generations.

The four Boxes have four Keys, but each Box only matches one Key.

Even if it's right there in front of you, if you use the wrong key, it will cause the power to go haywire, causing irredeemable damage. And even if the right Key is used, the user will be swallowed by that power, handing the world over to the Creators just like that.

No matter which way, all it leads to is destruction. And that's exactly why, these four Boxes

The Boxes are 'End of the Wind', 'Edge of the Earth', 'Mirror of the Water's Depth', and 'Inferno on the Tundra' respectively.

And one of the Keys, lies within the left arm of the human king, Robert Belal. They must never use it!

"Chop it off!"

The Shimaron man says, madness in his eyes. The soldiers holding down the prisoner look at their boss in surprise.

"...Chop that guy's left arm off! Either way he won't obey us any more, since he refuses to use the Key for Shimaron, then just chop off his left arm! You don't have to take his life. It's okay as long as we get the Key to open the Box!"

"But Your Excellency, once the power is released, no one can control it!"

"What the hell are you standing around for? Do it now!"

Before the old soldier can stop them, the soldiers, terrified by their master's expression of fury, have pinned Robert's left arm and legs onto the dirty stone floor.

And then, with one downward swing of the sword held high over the head, there's the dull sound of a blade snapping bone and knocking into the stone floor, the thick steel is broken into two, the sliced arteries waiting for a second before spraying warm blood everywhere, the chopped left arm lightly bouncing in the pool of blood.

The fingers gripped loosely into a fist are still moving.

Robert screams, rolling on the ground, breaking free from the enemy's hold in the process. The rookie soldiers are shocked into stillness, while the old hand has thrown away his reputation as a soldier and turned his face away.

Robert was waiting for this moment!

He kicks the wall by the tips of his toes forcefully, rising in one step, and snatches a sword from a young man frozen on the spot. By the time the livid Shimaron leader yells at his men to fight back, he has already defeated three men despite having only one arm.

“Your Excellency!”

In that moment, all eyes are pulled to the entrance to the room. A messenger soldier with no idea about the chaos within rushes in.

“The Box... The Box has been taken!”

“What?”

Robert doesn't take this opportunity to run, rushing instead to the center of the room. He tosses his sword at the man trying to stop him, and uses his remaining right arm to grip the 'Key' tightly.

He puts his five fingers into the pool of blood, and lifts his own left arm.

And then, hugging the still-warm arm, he quietly walks to the window, shrouded in darkness. He bends his knees and gathers his strength, then grabs the window sill and jumps upwards. All the motion around him looks slowed in his eyes, as though they belong in separate times, because up until now, no one has to catch him.

He turns around for a glance, engraving the image of his wife's body abandoned by the wall into his mind. The beautiful honey-colored hair is stained with red-black blood, the skin of her neck pale as wax.

Her soul has long since gone.

His young son's skinny limbs, hang limply underneath the chest embedded with the hilt of the short sword. The man who was once king murmurs their names.

“...I won't let you wait long.”

Robert Belal uses his armless shoulder to smash the window, and leaps into the darkening sky.

There's a giant lake right underneath the tower north of the castle. Should anything sink into this lake, which is cold in summer but doesn't freeze in winter, finding it would be impossible. Looking at the surface of the water, sparkling purple in the remaining rays of sunset, Robert says to the god he praised and prayed to every day,

"Please let this unfortunate Key to disaster and my body sleep peacefully forever in these depths."

But he knows—

There's no god in this world. If there were, his son wouldn't have died so tragically.

Hearing the deep splash of water, a few soldiers finally peep out of the window. There aren't any ripples, only a quiet purple water surface.

"Did he really fall?" A young man asks. Although they heard the splash, there aren't any ripples. Even as a living, breathing man sinks, there aren't even bubbles from his last breaths.

"Go! Get me the Key now!"

Their boss, having lost his sanity, even pushes a rookie out of the window. The body that falls, accompanied with screams, creates a huge splash before sinking into the lake, as the rookie desperately waves his limbs and cries for help.

Everyone runs to the stairs in panic.

As for the messenger completely out of tune with the situation, he just stands there dazedly as he watches the events unfolding before him, all the way until Englar pulls his shirt, forcing him to finally remember his duty coming here.

"You say the Box was taken? Not only did you grab it back, you had the nerve to come here?"

"No, no, we already did our best to prevent it getting taken, it's just that the opponent is too..."

"Which country?" "It's the mazoku."

The old soldier squatting beside the bodies calls his master with a strange expression. Of everyone there, only he shows respect to the woman who was once royal consort, even helping her clean up the dirt on her body.

The boss turns around, and sees the tiny body the old man pulled out from its protector's embrace.

"What is it?"

"...This baby, is still breathing."

You don't need to look too closely to see that his body is still shaking slightly. His soft and silky dark brown hair, moistened by his mother's blood, is plastered all over his forehead, and under those slightly open eyelids, are pale brown eyes just like Robert Belal's, with shining silver irises.

There are still red finger marks around his neck. The old soldier who noticed this, pulls the child's clothes up higher, as though trying to hide the finger marks.

Englar doesn't notice, though. He just uses the gaze of one possessed, staring hungrily at the baby's left arm.

"...Can this guy become the 'Key'?"

"I don't know, you still can't tell at this stage. Once he grows up, we have to see if he will have the same mark as his father." Or maybe it'll be just like the king who committed suicide said, and the wish will never come true again. But he doesn't dare voice that possibility. To let this child live on, it requires a special reason.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 - 1938, Spring, Boston

My name is April Graves.

But I wasn't born in April.

Although my parents insisted on an excuse like 'we wished you would become a cute girl that makes people think of the new green season', but since I was small I knew that my dark coffee-colored curls and dull blue-grey eyes have nothing at all to do with early spring in the current Boston.

I was more than ten-years-old before I found out that my name was insisted on by my grandmother. The neighbors at the mansion, the Pendletons, have a large family, and even the fourth son, Nick, who was around my age, knows everything about kids. Seems like he's going to get his third younger brother or sister, but they would only be born ten months later. So after I do a little counting with my friend who told me this, I realized that my birthday is exactly ten months away from April. In other words, this cute name of mine, April, was given to me according to the month of my conception.

I'm completely confused, as to why they didn't just call me 'Ann' and be done with it. Although eighteen years have passed since then, but to this day I would sometimes get thoughts like that.

The problem is Grandmother's opinion is absolute. Hazel Graves is always standing on the top of Graves family power pyramid, and forbids anyone from disagreeing with her. Truth is the family also gathered its wealth this way, creating a considerable position for itself in the cultural melting pot that is the United States. Grandfather used Grandmother's money to start a business, and the son-in-law who later inherited the Graves family business—in other words, April's father—is still keeping the business going strong. Not only did he survive the financial meltdown ten years ago, he can even solve the unfortunate news coming from Europe in the shortest possible time. This is all thanks to the entire Graves family uniting and obeying Grandmother's teachings. Even though she

was called back to the Lord's side two years ago, the entire family hasn't changed its style.

That's right, the most important thing is Grandmother's teachings.

Such as the habit that, even in safety, we must count to five before we take any actions.

April lies low behind the shirt wall underneath the window, and starts counting from deep within her throat. One, two, three... She only got to four when hurried footsteps come her way, a few officers running past the direction she had meant to escape to. She holds her breath, observing carefully, and notices that all four of the policemen have their fingers on the triggers. If she had dashed out five seconds earlier, she would have definitely been shot full of holes.

After the group of people passed, she finally leaves the scene. And ten, she hangs the targeted item around her neck, doing up her blouse to the last button.

What she's planning to take away from this castle, allegedly built from bribes, is a piece of jewelry passed down through generations of a once-royal family. The necklace, with striped amber as the main attraction, is so luxurious it can hardly be called beautiful anymore. According to legend, though, gems used in sacrifices have a mysterious power, and it would become redder, shinier if it absorbed the life energy of a pure and innocent young girl. Her lips curve into a small smile, as she thinks. 'Since nothing happened when I put it on, that proves I'm not innocent.'

"April!"

Her partner is waving at her from the tall wall, even wearing some army uniform he got from goodness knows where. The army-green jeep is already fired up and ready beside him.

"I'm jumping! DT!"

"What?"

Her partner's expression becomes a little panicked. It's hard to tell Asians' age to begin with, and his expression now makes him look five years younger than he already does. Although he's way past the big 30, but he still the baby face of a young Chinese boy.

“Hold on a sec! April! Let me get a mattress or something...”

Before he can even finish his sentence, April stomps down onto the tiles, proceeding to leap down the forty to fifty feet tall wall. In his panic DT holds out his arms, just managing to catch her.

“Mmph, my arm’s gonna break!”

“You’re exaggerating. And the really heavy thing isn’t me, it’s the necklace.”

“It’s not a matter of weight! Who actually just jumps like that! And from somewhere so high! You really are too rash, too impulsive. And this isn’t the only time! You’ve been like this the past two years, and your plans aren’t graceful or careful at all. Besides, the ‘prey’ was just in the next state, why did we have to run all the way to Mexico?”

“Not bad, you were really shocked too. It’s so funny!”

“Don’t you laugh! You should have discussed it with me, and you should have done some investigations beforehand too! I heard that Hazel Graves was known for her gracefulness, and to think that her granddaughter is like this...”

Interrupting his resenting lecture, April jumps onto the dirty jeep.

“What, why don’t you blame yourself for not being strong enough? Look at those skinny arms, you should go train them up, play some football.”

“You’re blaming me? You’re trying to put everything on me, aren’t you?”

Compared to the men April meets in her daily life, namely relatives or high school classmates, the Asian’s figure is smaller, and his limbs thinner. Truth is April’s own physique isn’t that much better, so it’s basically the pot calling the kettle black.

“Whatever, back in my hometown this counts as very standard. You on the other hand, you’re already eighteen, so why do you still have an iron board figure? Take me for instance, I’ve never dated a ‘flat’ person before.”

“Chest size has nothing to do with work.”

Before she even finishes her sentence, she whacks down hard on the back of her senior partner’s head.

“A-and you’re so violent... I wanna quit, I’m going split with you no matter what. Though Hazel did help me a lot, I did follow her requests and acted as your babysitter for two years...”

She doesn’t know which country he came from, or even asked for his real name and age. All she knows is that he opens a Chinese restaurant, and the unbelievable thing is that he even has a pretty little wife. When the grandmother brought her beloved granddaughter to Chinatown for a meal, the restaurant they headed for was run by his wife, though at that time she didn’t know DT yet.

When they first met in the restaurant, she thought that this woman must have been an oriental princess before she came to America, because no one suited a deep red cheongsam better than her. Even though she was carrying a silver tray full of spoons, plates and bowls, her every move was so graceful, attracting everybody’s attention. Her silky black hair was piled on top of her head, revealing the soft fair skin on her neck. Even April, who is of the same gender, felt that the familiar way with which she used that uniquely designed spoon was very sexy.

But when she asked him, ‘Since you already such a pretty little wife and a booming restaurant business, why are you still doing something like this?’, DT replies indignantly,

‘That restaurant is my wife’s business,’

And as her grandmother’s was dying, April had been suddenly partnered with DT at Fenway Park.

“DT, this girl is called April, she’s my heir, please be partners with her for two years.”

Sixteen-year-old April, with no idea what being modest meant, was furious at her grandmother’s actions, but she believed that with her abilities, she could pull it off. However the truth was, a greenhorn rookie like her couldn’t operate on her own, and even her decision-making skills were only learned after that first year when she barely got to keep her name.

But then, the remaining year is almost over too.

DT steps on the accelerator, saying,

“It’s just next week, the deal of two years ends next week. By then, I’ll be a

free man, and I can go back to working alone, all carefree like I used to, and I'll never have to protect a fine little missy like you again. Although I feel a bit sad about it, but I don't want to be partners with a teenage girl anymore."

"Even if you wanted to be partners with me, I wouldn't want you! Just thinking about it, not having to listen to an old man's directions, I feel ten years younger."

"If you were ten years younger than you are now, wouldn't you just be a little monkey running around..."

"Stop your nagging!"

Because April tapped his shoulder, the entire jeep leans to the right. Just then, a few bullets run holes through the asphalt road, exactly where the car was earlier.

"Uh-oh!"

The duo quickly shirk their heads, and try their best to sink lower into their seats. They sneak a peek behind them, and see two men poking their bodies out of a black Ford sedan, waxed until it shone.

"They dare chase us with such a shiny car. DT, I'm getting ready to counterattack!"

Before DT can reply, she already has the dark green rifle in her hands. Although it's a small weapon completely contrasting her petite figure, she's more confident using it than those new recruits.

"You really don't have an ounce of a pure girl's heart, asking, 'Can I counterattack?' ... Ah—Fine, you counter, just fight back all you wish! But wait until we cross the state border! I'm not familiar with the cops in the Bay State^[1]."

Why would she have what pure girl's heart!

The driver mumbles, "Really, why did Hazel find such a reckless girl to be her heir?"

Recently, Beacon Hill is full of nothing but those annoying high class sedans.

That's why, even though it's Sunday evening approaching dusk, the feeling of riding on a bike and weaving through the queue is super satisfying. Especially when you're riding a dusty military auction piece down Charles Street with its adorable signs, it's particularly eye-catching. All the elegant-looking old ladies are frowning, and the couples walking hand in hand whispering.

It doesn't matter what you say, I'm used to people talking behind my back anyway.

April drives her bike to the tiled automobile entrance, and pulls off the green safety helmet so worn it looks almost black. Although she's at the back gate, there's already a fifty-plus-year-old man waiting for her at the door. He's dressed immaculately in a suit. If she remembers correctly, his tie has never been even a centimeter crooked.

"Welcome back, Young Miss."

He bows his white head, bending down slightly to accept April's helmet.

"I'm back, Mr Hobart. Could you please find someone to help me park the bike in the garage?"

Be it to butlers or servants, you always have to respect them, that's Grandmother's teaching. Actually, Hobart is a perfect butler, and worthy of respect as an elder in life, and he's been at this house since before she was born, so she knows him for a longer time than anyone else.

Not only is he April's first friend, he's also an existence closer to her than her parents.

"Please, call me Banwart. On the other hand, Young Miss, you are much later than you were expected to be, Master and Mistress left an hour ago."

"No way? An hour ago? God, whose party is it today? Uh—uh—I think it was something to do with fundraising, right?"

Hobart pushes open the heavy door, continuing slowly,

"It's the museum fundraising. The evening dress for tonight is already hanging in your closet, it seems Mistress chose it for you. As Louisa's daughter is delivering, she has gone home. If you don't mind, Ishtar will help you get ready."

“Alright, but I think there’s no time to tie my hair now... That Ishtar is the newcomer Brunit’s daughter, right? Can she speak Spanish? Do you think if I ask her, will she teach me like you did?”

“Of course she will.”

April’s German teacher was Hobart. Grandmother ordered her young granddaughter to call him teacher during the six hours of class every week. Mother wanted to employ a professional tutor, disagreeing with Grandmother’s opinion. But it’s thanks to her wonderful educator that not only did her German results improve tremendously, she can now speak German as fluently as she can English.

If she can master Spanish the same way, that’s one more country she can go to without needing a translator.

“I’ll tell Ishtar later. Just in case, I have prepared some simple evening attire for Mr DT as well.”

Having served the household since Grandmother’s generation, Hobart is fairly familiar with Aprils antics and partner.

To protect his company and property, April’s father, as the son-in-law, had heard of this secret from his wife’s parents. But since Grandmother died and to this day, the person who knows most about her underground work is undeniably this butler.

“No point, he’s not coming as usual. But thanks for your consideration, if he knew about it, he would definitely be very happy.”

Every time she asks him, ‘Do you want to come?’, the Asian only smiles craftily, saying, ‘If you want me to go into a place like Beacon with a wealthy little heiress, in some ways you’ll start a commotion.’ She’s ashamed of herself for being unable to deny his words, and sometimes she hates herself for belonging to that type of society.

April takes off her shoes roughly, rushing up the stairs barefooted, and then stops at the interval between flights, poking her body over the banister to tell Hobart,

“Oh, yeah, Mama said she would help me choose my dress, don’t tell me it’s

the super extravagant pink one, is it? Because if it is, then crap, the sleeves might not fit.”

“...But your figure doesn’t seem to have changed...”

“Come on, congratulate me, I’ve finally got biceps.”

She curves her arms up to show her confused elderly friend.

“April! Why are you dressed like that!”

At first she wanted to sneak in, but then Mama rushes right over.

“I’ve told you a hundred thousand times, but you’re still late. And now that you’ve finally shown up, you’re wearing something so out of fashion? You practically look like a songstress from the Wild West!”

“Mama, you really don’t have an eye for the antique, this was Grandma’s favorite dress! Look at the lace on this collar, it’s so intricate. Don’t you remember this outfit? Back then Grandma wore this dark blue dress to the social world of Europe...”

“Of course I remember! Because you wore the exact same thing to last week’s party!”

Only after her mother mentioned it does she notice it.

Her mother, having received a proper heiress’ education, frowns exaggeratedly, as though the world is ending. And then Mama points at her chest, so April instinctively dodges. Since the person accepting this thing will be here at the party, she had worn it directly.

“And what country did that cheap-looking necklace come from? Whatever, it must have been bought at some strange antique shop. I just can’t stand you! Are you trying to do some voodoo? That style doesn’t fit young girls at all! I say, April, where’s the ruby necklace? The jewelry for this party tonight, didn’t I already match it properly and put it in your dresser?”

Mama, you really can’t tell the worth of this piece. If she knew that her daughter had gotten into a gunfight for it, she would surely faint on the spot.

“But I don’t like to wear stupid pink dresses! Besides if I wear a style like that, the excessive material will make me look even shorter. I’m already small enough, so I have to wear something with more personality!”

“God, what is this child saying... Why are you so uncute.”

April looks around carefully, and there are a few ‘heiresses’ staring directly at the Graves mother and daughter. They have elegant hats on their heads, wearing elegant dresses and even gloves. If they dressed like that in the desert, they’d get a sunstroke within three minutes.

“Everybody, good day—”

April waves her right hand smilingly, and her cousin [\[2\]](#)—the only blonde beauty in her family, the gorgeous Dianne Graves, looks at her uneasily.

She is straightforward, and gentle. She always takes April’s side too, it’s just too bad that she can’t help April in this situation.

“How I wish you would be more like Dianne. Look at her, so feminine and well-bred, and she can converse freely with the gentlemen too.”

“I can also talk with the men... No, I mean, I also frequently chat with the gentlemen, Mother.”

“That’s your biggest problem!”

Truth is, when she has too, April can act like a proper lady too! And she’d wear a dress so long she trips over the hem so many damn times. Not only can she attend a formal party properly, she can also talk right to the men’s hearts. And her specialty is beating those allegedly cultured men in an argument of words, but if they want to compare drinking skills she’s likewise unbeatable.

Thing is, if minors were discovered drinking in this state, they would be immediately arrested.

“Speaking of which, what are those things in your dresser? It’s practically the special corner for cowgirls and jungle explorers. Are you planning to marry to a German farm? Cowboys and whatnot, they’re only suited for games before six-years-old! Like Mama, I was looking for a husband by the time I was eighteen.”

Even if she mentioned her relationships with the opposite sex now, it wouldn’t

work, would it.

“Oh, right, April, what did you get from the colleges you visited? If you don’t choose a school carefully...”

“Right, there’s a place in New York with a very unique antique professor...”

“God, a professor! Wouldn’t he be a bit too old?”

Mother doesn’t understand the meaning or purpose of ‘professor’.

“Listen to me closely, April, I’m begging you, please be as elegant and feminine as Dianne, and find a nice person to date, okay? And hurry, so your Papa and Mama don’t have to worry about you all the time. You should know that you are the Graves family’s precious only daughter, after all you inherited your Grandmother’s name.”

But, Mama...

April sighs, pretending not to have heard anything.

Including Mother, most of the family doesn’t know Grandmother’s true identity, and they have no idea how that heroine got enough money to start a large business. The only ones who know the truth about Hazel Graves’ identity after her marriage and childbirth, are probably Grandfather, Father, and the granddaughter, April.

And when Hazel Graves was on the verge of death, the only one present was April. Just thinking about the situation back then, she still feels a chill down her spine, and she even has recurring nightmares, dreaming about her grandmother being covered from head to toe in flames.

That happened when the newly acquired house was being renovated into an exhibition room.

That was the day she personally moved a few important things, things that the family rarely sees, into the house. April felt as though she heard a scream, and so she rushed upstairs. When she pushed open the door to the room her grandmother was in, she saw Hazel and the little coffin there surrounded in flames.

Her entire body covered in blue flames, Grandmother’s expression

nevertheless showed not a bit of pain. Even though the flames had burned to the curtains and the carpet, April didn't feel any heat at all, despite standing nearby. And suddenly she had a mysterious thought, that maybe those flames didn't belong to this world.

In her dreams, Grandmother would definitely look at April sadly, shaking her head as she said,

'Never ever touch it.'

I have indeed inherited the Graves' house and Hazel Graves' belongings, but that's not all. Although the contents of the will never mentioned it, April understands deep in her heart, that the things her grandmother gave her can't be expressed in simply numbers.

Mother reaches out her hand to touch her daughter's not-long, not-short hair, sighing again deeply. How she wished this daughter of hers could cut a bob or get a perm, or pile her hair on top of her head elegantly like other girls would.

"Look at your hair, it's so dry. And April, it's only been a week, so how did you get so dark... Speaking of which, why is there a weird smell on you... Like an odor of dust... or mould."

Crap! Mama, sorry. Although it wasn't easy for me to find time to shower, I didn't have time to wash my hair.

"April, what kind of college did you visit? And what is this worn-out hair ornament? Don't you have quite a few perfectly luxurious..."

The naggy voice becomes a scream. Turns out there's an eight-legged animal, around five centimeters in full length, crawling on her white silk gloves.

"Oh my god--! It's a spider! There's a spider! There's a poisonous spider on my hand!"

"Calm down, Mama, it's not poisonous, it's just a normal spider. See, it's the type that builds their webs in sewers or abandoned houses..."

"Why would that kind of thing be living in your hair?"

"Hey, that's a mean thing to say. It's not living in my hair!"

Dianne, who was nearby, runs over. She wants to calm the storm over here before it becomes a commotion.

“Aunty, get a grip on yourself. It’s okay, there were always a lot of spiders in the trees in the yard. Here, do you want to rest a little over there? There’s great circulation near the balcony, it’s really comfortable there.”

She carefully leads her aunt to the chair for a seat, and then deliberately runs back through the crowd. She’s not here to scold April for arguing with her mother, but to console her. This cousin of hers, two years older, is a perfectly kind person, so much so it gets on April’s nerves sometimes.

“April, don’t feel too bad about it.”

She thinks to herself, ‘Who’s feeling bad!’

“Actually I was really mischievous too when I was young, and I was scolded by my mother too when I got cobwebs in my hair once. Aunty was surely just a little shocked, I think she’s not upset with you.”

The dark gold hair curling inwards, the slightly puffed up pale red cheeks, and those deep blue eyes twinkling with wisdom and compassion. There’s nothing at all in common between Dianne and her, and no one can imagine that they are cousins, because Dianne’s personality is kind as a saint. She never refutes anyone’s personality, and was never heard saying anything bad about anything.

Dianne Graves is everyone’s ideal woman. All the men in the country are falling over themselves to propose to her, but unfortunately she’s already taken.

As for her partner, he’s almost like a storybook character. If he wore puffy long pants and a hat with a feather, he would be Prince Charming incarnate. He would come fetch her every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings in his sky blue car, and would send her home at precisely ten in the night, earning him the nickname of Mr Punctuality.

The Harvard Prince and the academy’s ideal woman. How on earth did such a terrifying couple get together?

“Although Aunty said so already, if you ask me I still think you should choose your college carefully.”

If you had to find a fault with Dianne Graves, it would be that she always mistakes April as her young and helpless cousin. Every year April feels like telling her, ‘Dianne, can you please see the real me?’

“You should learn the things you want to do, or want to learn, and I’m sure Aunty will understand. Although my power is limited, but I will support you. If there’s anything I can help with, just tell me! Oh, right, April, did you hear about the Civil War movie?”

Dianne holds her hand tightly like an older sister, and desperately tries to look for a happier topic of conversation. Seeing her cousin frowning wordlessly, she probably misunderstood that she’s still very dejected.

“I heard that the set is huge. Shall we visit it together? Maybe we can even see some of the actors! Right, also, next month I plan on going to Europe, if you’re free do you want to come along? Eh... April, this is so pretty... I keep thinking... the color scheme is so unique...”

Dianne, who was talking non-stop, suddenly sounds ineligible, as though drunk. April notices something off, but before she can turn away, her cousin’s hand is already wrapped around the striped amber jewelry.

“You can’t!”

“Ah...”

“Dianne?”

In that moment all the blood drains from her face, and her hands droop to her sides. Powerlessly, she falls to the ground like a puppet whose strings were cut.

“Crap! What to do? Dianne, pull yourself together!”

April tries to catch her frantically, but Dianne’s helpless body is heavier than she imagined, and so April sits onto the ground, trying to test her cousin’s breathing. Although her face is as white as paper, and her lips have turned greenish-purple, at least she still has a faint breath.

On the other hand, the striped amber shining red-brown, trying to absorb some more young female life force, is still calling out to its prey. Even though Dianne Graves has lost consciousness, she still lifts her slender fingers in her bid

to touch the gem.

“You can’t!”

The people around, who were minding their own business earlier, notice the commotion and start gathering. In no time at all the girls are surrounded by curious onlookers, and receive many curious gazes.

“Can someone please call the doctor, or the ambulance?”

Deciding that no one was going to help, April uses all her strength to lift up her cousin. Right now all she can do is rely on her own strength to slowly move her cousin to a place she can lie down and rest.

“Please, can you help me call the doctor?”

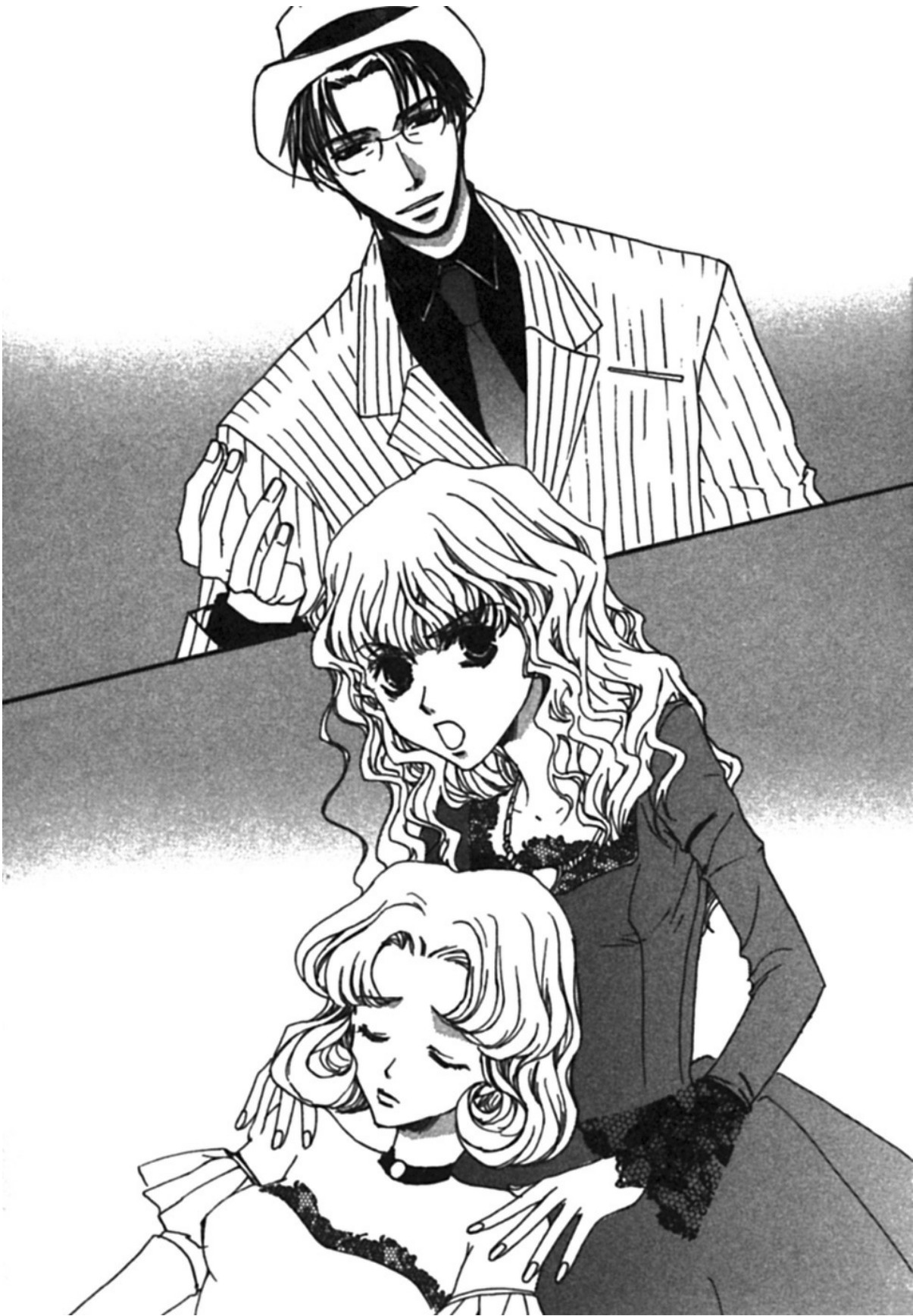
“Just let her lie down like that.”

“Eh?”

April suddenly hears someone talking to her and lifts her head, only to see a uniquely-dressed gentleman weaving through the crowd and walking towards her.

“You can’t lift her with your strength alone, you might even hurt your back instead! Whatever happens, you should just let her lie down where she is. Don’t worry, unconscious people won’t complain about the bounciness of the bed.”

In the hall where everyone is dressed extravagantly, only he is wearing mud-stained leather boots. Not only are those outdated stripes completely out of place in this event, he’s even wearing a panama hat.



He should be in the middle of a long journey. That's what he looks like in April's eyes.

The man squats down and takes Dianne's wrist, checking her pulse with the second hand on his watch. And then he opens her eyelids, and touches her neck, upon confirming her pulse, he lifts the helm of his hat. His black hair is mixed with a pinch of white, but those black eyes behind his sunglasses and he skin on his face look very young. He should be younger than Papa or Mama, probably

around thirty approaching forty.

“Don’t worry, she’s fine. There’s nothing to be concerned about, it should be just a slight case of anemia.”

“Who are you?”

Perhaps there’s too much distrust in the question, because he smiles bitterly behind the oval lenses,

“Do you think I’m a suspicious character? I’m a doctor, and I was already practicing when you were born.”

When he smiles, there are wrinkles in the corners of his eyes. The reason he looks younger than his actual age, is probably because of that messy fringe. For a doctor, his manner of speaking isn’t that authoritative either, and besides, there’s a hard-to-place accent.

“Can anyone help this lady onto the bed? Just in case, it’s best to call her primary doctor over for a check-up, we must never let her family worry about her. And then, April...”

Before she can ask him how he knew her name, the doctor’s hand is already reaching out for the striped amber jewelry. Whatever, since it only absorbs ‘the life force of pure innocent young girls’, it wouldn’t affect him.

“You have a special eye for these things.”

“It’s none of your business!”

April turns around and takes the gem, which had darkened again, from the doctor’s hands, and then slowly stands up to give her spot over to Dianne’s boyfriend, who had come over to fuss over her.

“I’m very grateful to you for treating my cousin. But everything else, should have nothing to do with you. And there’s no reason for an outsider like you to interrupt.”

But the man looks like he wants to whistle out loud.

“I see, now I finally understand why Hazel made you her heir.”

“What does that mean?”

He said Grandmother's name and the job she never revealed to outsiders, so April has no choice but to subtly prepare herself.

"Who are you? Are you Grandma's friend?"

"He is Hazel's friend, April."

She turns around, following that familiar voice, and finds the man she had met several times before smiling the way he always did.

"That's the item I wanted, right?"

"That's right, Bob."

Everyone calls him by that nickname, no one calls his last name. Truth is he does have a last name passed down from his ancestors, but aside from signing contracts, that long line of words has no meaning at all to him.

Most people call him Bob, and this man, known to a certain number of people as the 'Maou', had been standing there since a while ago, one hand on his walking stick with a friendly expression.

References

1. [↑](#) Nickname for Massachusetts
2. [↑](#) The word here in Chinese is 'older female cousin from my father's side'.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 - Chinatown

If she were a kid who only ate with her parents, she would definitely never step into this restaurant in her entire life.

Starting with her mother, those posh and uptight Graves family relatives, will only go to those restaurants you can't get in without proper attire. Let's put it this way, they feel that eating dinner in plain clothes is a very dumb thing to do.

April holds up the smooth chopsticks, pushing the silver fork aside.

The woman wearing a silk cheongsam with beautiful embroidery is bringing some steaming hot bowls on a tray over to her. She is the restaurant's lady owner, Kou Li. The long-tailed animal sewn with gold thread is apparently a bid of paradise.

"Bob comes here to eat lobster quite often, but April hasn't been here in a while, huh. I say, April, does it have anything to do with that man of mine? Did DT prevent you coming to my shop?"

"How is that possible?"

The lady owner puts the soup in front of her customers, and then leaves the table to serve the next dish. April stares, mesmerized, at her long white legs, playing peekaboo through the slit in her cheongsam. DT shrugs, looking surprised,

"Don't look so perverted. What's the matter? Are you mesmerized by my wife's beautiful legs? You are a woman, right?"

"I'm thinking, she has such nice legs, so why did she marry a guy like you?"

"...Y-you really are very not cute..."

Who knows what he was hearing, because Bob says happily,

"Seems like you guys get on quite well with each other, just like Hazel hoped you would."

“How is this getting along? Don’t joke around, Bob!”

DT takes the opportunity before April can protest, bending over the hot soup,

“I’m just being this kid’s babysitter for two years according to the contract, since Hazel took care of me a lot too, but next week I’ll be free. The only reason I keep holding on, is all for that day... I can finally get away from this bitch!”

“You’re the pansy! I’ve never seen a man so scared of spiders and cockroaches that he doesn’t dare enter a cellar!”

“Mmph!”

“Don’t always pretend like you’re an expert, your success rate only became a hundred per cent after you partnered up with me, didn’t it? Think back on your own previous jobs, your success rate was horrible.”

“Ugh!”

“Seems like she’s got a sharper tongue than you.”

Bob faces the woman sitting with him, introducing the feuding partners.

“Don’t worry, Edith, these two will get it back.”

“Thank you...”

A faint smile appears on the old woman’s wrinkled face, directly opposite to them, but she doesn’t look like she plans to drink the soup any time soon.

Their table is set a bit further away from the other customers, in a good spot near the window facing the sun. Around the table there are five people of different ages and genders, April, DT, Bob, the old woman named Edith, and the bespectacled doctor from before.

These people had immediately been introduced by name once they met in the shop, but no further details were asked.

“April, this lady is Edith Bapu(?), she just migrated to France from Austria.” The old woman with her white hair cut short doesn’t meet anyone’s gazes. The reason she left her country, as an American April can actually hazard a guess.

She was forced by the Nazis to flee.

As for the doctor who feels exactly the opposite of her, the bespectacled

Regent, he's so friendly he doesn't feel like a Frenchman at all. He uses the uniquely shaped spoon and chopsticks to eat the Chinese food easily. At first she thought he was around 35 years old, but when he chats about his experience as an army doctor near the border of Germany, he should be over forty. There's a pinch of white in his black hair, and black eyes behind those lenses, Although he's changed into another suit, but he's still wearing that Panama hat from yesterday.

Henry Regent. This name sounds familiar, is he one of Grandmother's young friends?

"After all, these two did find the missing royal jewels that were supposed to be in Mexico in the neighboring state. Although I know quite adventurers and treasure hunters, but it's really rare to find examples like theirs, who didn't have to go so far to finish the job."

Bob expertly pokes his fork into the smooth vegetables, moisture leaking out of the plump stem immediately.

"The way you're saying it, I don't know if you're praising us or taunting us."

"Of course I'm praising you, April."

Whatever, whether it's a compliment or criticism, the most important thing is to successfully his request.

"What happened to that necklace afterwards?"

"It's in safe hands now, and after the situation in Europe calms down we'll send it back to Spain. Now, even if we send it back there, it'll only be reduced to decorating the dictator's treasure box."

"But why would they want something so ominous? Most people wouldn't want to even touch a cursed gem, right?"

"The one who wants it is a man who will soon be a local prosecutor. He has money, status, the only thing he lacks is an imposing family background and bloodline. So he wants to get something that can prove his family line runs wide, and is trying to buy a famous bloodline."

April harrumphs contemptuously.

“I don’t get what’s going on in that head of his! Why would he want something like that? Look at me, I just wish I could get rid of my name and wealth.”

“Not everyone in this world is like you.”

The man referred to by some as ‘the Demon King of the Financial World’ gives a smile like an old man chatting with his granddaughter. His expression says that he knows anything there is to know about April.

As for his real roots, there aren’t many people who really know. He has deep grey curls and a mustache, while those eyes whose color is hid behind those thick brows are extremely spirited, sometimes looking gentle and calm, while at other times turning hesitant and distant, due to the content of the conversation.

It was like that when he participated in Grandmother’s funeral. April, having seen him, was shocked into stillness by his unapproachable aura, and didn’t even dare speak to him. Although she doesn’t know the real reason people call him the Demon King, but whenever she remembers his cruel, dark gaze that day, she cannot deny that the nickname fits him well.

But on the other hand, even though he has such an ominous nickname, Bob is actually is a trustworthy person. Even if people betray him, he will never betray anyone! Grandmother and DT both said that before. And they had told her in full confidence, “He will never become our enemy.”

Judging from the time he’s known Grandmother, they must have almost fifty years of friendship. But to April, who doesn’t know his real age, he looks around the same age as the bespectacled Doctor Regent.

Instead of saying he hasn’t changed, it’d be better to say he looks considerably younger than when they first met.

Although his decisiveness comes from his work being largely connected to investments, but he still has other actions underground that shouldn’t come to light. And those secret organization-like operations have everything to do Hazel Graves.

That is, returning objects to their rightful places.

Letting the priceless works of art break away from the illegal deals that defile their worth and return to their truly suitable owners, letting the precious

treasures that should be shared by all humankind return to a place of safety where they won't be affected by personal gains.

"So, Bob, what do you want me to steal this time?"

April brings the rice-roasted tea to her lips, moistening her throat with the warm drink before continuing,

"Is it Madam Bapu's property?"

"Don't call it 'stealing', it's not nice on the ears. Actually, that isn't Edith's belonging."

"But you just said you wanted us to retrieve it."

"...That box, was something my husband was entrusted with."

"Box?"

April and DT echo in unison after Edith says those words in her soft voice. In the past the duo had come across countless paintings, jewelry and gems, but this is the first time they're dealing with a box. As for Regent and Bob, who seem to know the whole story, they're waiting for the old lady to continue.

"My husband was an art dealer who deals all over the world, and after he turned fifty he opened a small art gallery back home, living life almost off the radar. But starting around last year, the party's rules had become very strict... They said the paintings in our possession will cause rot in the society, and quite a few of our colleagues were forcefully detained. That's why we decided to end our business and escape to France. But my husband fell ill just as we were departing, and then..."

"He passed away, didn't he?"

The old woman nods weakly in reply.

"I'm so sorry."

"No... Thinking about all those young people with their bright futures cut short just like that, I feel that we elderly living for too long is a kind of sin, right now Vienna is just like that... So, as a widow, I had no choice but to hurriedly sort through my husband's belongings before the agency arrived. No matter what, I wanted to take the precious things kept in the store out of there. Amongst

them... is that box, that item we were keeping on someone else's behalf."

"Keeping on someone else's behalf?"

"That's right, it was something we kept for someone else. According to my husband's will, it seems that he had forcefully pleaded with the original owner to entrust it to him. Because he was really interested in the origins and decoration on the box, and wanted to investigate it carefully. According to the literal explanation.... I think it's called Noah's Box."

April puts down the teacup in her hands, the amber tea turning cold. She doesn't take her eyes off the old lady and Bob.

"Wait, is it a box? Or an ark? If it's an intricate model of Noah's Ark, or something really religious like that, then that's beyond me and DT's expertise. Right, DT?"

"That's right. After all I'm a pagan, and April isn't a very religious person either."

"That's why, Bob. Maybe you'll think we shouldn't say things like this, but I suggest it's better if you find that whip-wielding university professor..."

"It's not an ark, April."

The previously silent Regent suddenly interrupts her, looks like he knows some important inside information too.

"It's because some devout Christians fear its qualities and call it that. It's about half the size of a coffin, and it's just a box made of normal, unassuming wood that sinks when thrown into the water, though that's because of the heavy furnishings they added on afterwards."

"You said the box's qualities? Even if it has some ominous origins, but it's still just a box, right?"

"About that, MISS Graves..."

Regent pushes his glasses up his nose with his middle finger, a smile in those eyes behind the lenses.

"That thing's qualities are even more important than its origins, but it's not any sort of torture device, nor does it have any special mechanisms you can see with

the naked eye.”

“Then what is it? Don’t tell me it’s some jokebox with a monster sealed inside?”

“You’re really sharp, just as expected of Hazel’s heir. But the monster sealed inside isn’t the kind of monsters you Americans imagine, though in some sense it can also be called a type of monster.”

DT sticks out his tongue rudely, looking utterly disgusted, perhaps he thought of some Asian monster.

“It shouldn’t be a box, more like a ‘door’. A door that leads to a power that must never be touched, an unbelievable power sealed away so it can never fall into anyone’s hands. This door, which is to say, if this entrance is ever opened, this whole world will be caught in that terrifying power. Long, long ago in the distant past, who knows how much blood, how many lives, were sacrificed to seal up that power capable of destroying the world. Of course that seal can only be opened by the true ‘Key’...”

Regent’s smile takes on a hint of unease.

“What does that mean?”

“...Very unfortunately, something like the ‘Key’ also seems to be in this world.”

“‘Like the Key’...”

“April, the box... that is the entrance, there are four of them in total, and there are the same number of Keys, which makes one Key for each Box. Other than that, nothing can open it. But if we use something like the Key to force it open... It’ll only let the power leak out incompletely. By then no one will be able to control it, be it the mysterious power sealed away, or the user of the Key.”

“Wait a sec. What you’re saying is, as long as you have one of the four Keys, even if you can’t open the Box fully, you can at least open a crack, right? Then, do you know where this mismatched Key that can open the crack is?”

“You catch on quickly, that’s perfectly right.”

“No, I don’t!”

DT, who was reaching his chopsticks out for the shiny squid, says as he

replaces the ebony chopsticks back onto the table.

“Like me, I didn’t understand that. I’ve been listening to you quietly since just now, and then all you talk about is demons, monsters, a threatening power and whatnot, and it’s called ‘Noah’s Box’? It’s religion-related no matter how I look at it!”

“DT.”

The Asian man narrows his single-lidded eyes, looking at the people around with different religious views from him.

“Some of you here may really believe in the existence of God or the Devil, and the great man that can change water into wine and split the sea in two. But even if our Oriental hell has demons, we don’t have fallen angels who trick the humans. This may be a bit cruel to you devout people, but all that about the mysterious sealed power being released, or the evil mummy in the Box losing control, all that is just nonsense—”

No one mentioned anything about mummies.

“I don’t blame you for reacting this way.”

Regent replies calmly. This doctor is different from the Frenchmen they met before. Not only does he believe in teamwork, he also has patience, and he’s not partial to French either, speaking to everyone passionately in English.

“Adding the word ‘Noah’ does indeed make people misunderstand that it’s something religious. But DT, the one sealed here isn’t God, or the Devil, and it definitely isn’t some old pharaoh’s mummy, and besides if we were looking for the Ark or the Holy Grail, the church has plenty of experts we can ask for help.”

That’s true, anything that starts with the word ‘Holy’ does tend to be more problematic than others. To get it successfully, not only do you have to be faithful to God, you also have to memorize the Bible from cover to cover. Even Hazel Graves, known as a master amongst masters, usually avoids any item related to Christianity.

Regent gives Bob a look, to confirm if he can state the truth of the matter.

“This Box is called ‘Mirror’s Depth’. If Noah’s Ark is said to protect the people

from floods, then this is the complete opposite. It can control seas, rivers, lakes and the sky, creating destructive storms, tsunamis, currents and heavy rain.”

“This illogical nonsense again, how can such a small wooden box control the weather?”

“Don’t tell me that to this day, you haven’t come across anything that science can’t explain?”

His retort puts DT at a loss for words. Most of his requests up until now are supernatural CASEs.

Just then another two waiters send warm desserts over, the decorations on top made beautifully to look like fruits. Before long Kou Li comes by, lightly putting a heavy black cake in front of the silent, head-lowered old woman.

“A German dessert shop opened nearby recently, I hope the taste isn’t too different from your home country.”

“Thank you.”

But the next time you come here, you have to try our ‘Desserts’[\[1\]](#). Aiya, I’m such a showoff, is my pronunciation all right?”

Edith’s expression softens for the first time, and she smiles at the lady owner.

Kou Li really is amazing, it’s such a waste she married DT. Affected by the atmosphere, April gives a small smile, but even so she cannot forget her work.

“However, even though your husband passed away, aren’t the Box and related documents with you? You don’t have to call of us out here, can’t you just return it to the owner?”

“That’s because...”

DT’s eyelid twitches. But he still doesn’t make a sound, just watches the other end of the road.

“After my husband’s funeral, I left the city we lived in with my daughter and son-in-law. Most of the art pieces we left to our colleagues there, all we took were a few really precious items, but when we reached the border customs, all that...”

“Was taken from you?”

“Yes, all of it was confiscated. Not only the paintings, even the small carvings, gems and jewelry, they were all confiscated.”

“The public order near the borders is really bad, those robbers who don’t even understand art actually...”

“No, they weren’t taken by criminals.”

She was just going to ask ‘then who?’ when she remembered, that this person had escaped from the clutches of the dictator.

“It was the Nazis.”

Maybe remembering the situation back then, Edith’s entire body starts shivering. Regent softly puts his hand on her shoulder.

“...Those soldiers, took those works of art that we risked our lives for, and treated them like—m like magazines or firewood, just piling them onto the truck... They were that rough... Even the little ruby my daughter was wearing on her, and my late husband’s watch was taken away.”

“They don’t allow the Jews to take away any possessions. Be it money, bonds, or precious jewelry. Even the way they treat works of art is getting worse by the day. They go around defacing paintings and famous works, then they throw away everything the President doesn’t like. Technically the government can definitely sell those things to earn a profit, but the way I see even Picassos or Cezzanes could have been burnt, just like that. But what the truth really is, we outsiders have no clue.”

“What a pity!”

The man people call the Demon King puts his long slender fingers on his forehead, stretching his fingertips like a woman. His fingertips are shorter and rounder than April’s, more graceful and refined.

“Back then, the Box too... even the cheap-looking Box was taken away. Because that was something we were holding for someone else, and no matter what we had to return it, that’s why we had it with us.”

“Eh? But didn’t you just say that it’s a plain and common wooden box?”

“That’s right, it is indeed an old box you can see anywhere. Even my daughter and I can’t figure out why the army thought it was worth taking away. But I really feel very guilty, not being able to return the item we had borrowed to its original owner...”

“I understand.”

April straightens her spine, immediately telling the old woman on the verge of bursting into tears,

“So we just have to snatch it back, and return it to the original owner, right? Alright, buck up! There’s no need to beat yourself up over something like this, Madam Bapu, just leave the rest to us. Don’t worry, it’s not our first time going against an army anyway.”

“But though it’s an army, it’s not a normal army.”

“I know that. The people who took away the paintings and the people who were looking for the box, they were wearing different uniforms. One of them was wearing the common Nazi army uniform, but the ones who took away the Box were generals wearing a black uniform.

April’s hand on the table folds tightly into a fist, suddenly covered with warm, uncomfortable sweat. She really shouldn’t have heard that just now.

“It’s the Schutz Staffel, isn’t it?”

What a troublesome opponent.

“But why would the SS want such an ordinary box?”

“I’m afraid they know that it’s the Mirror’s Depth too. As long as it can strengthen their forces, those men don’t care if it’s a legend or a miracle, they’re still willing to give it a try. Maybe they found out about the Box’s true abilities from somewhere, and want to claim it for themselves.”

Suddenly, there’s the sound of metal clanging. Turns out the silver fork DT had pushed aside has fallen to the ground.

“No way? Those infamous Nazis, would actually believe something so supernatural and unscientific? They would believe that inside a dirty coffin is a machine that will cause tsunamis? How is that possible? It’s im—po—ssi—ble!

Hey hey hey, which century do you think you're in? This is the twentieth century, and more than halfway through the twentieth century too!"

"I can understand how you feel, DT."

Hearing the smiling French doctor call his name, April's partner abruptly stops his rant.

"Although I don't know what happened to you in the continent, but it must have been something terrifying that you had no choice to believe, huh."

"What is it, DT? What on earth happened?"

"N-n-nothing, nothing h-happened at all!"

"Liar! Just look at your panicked expression, something definitely happened! There must be something other than spiders and insects that scares you, right?"

"I said no means... Waa!"

Not too far away, there's suddenly a loud, dry explosion sound.

Just then, everyone there instinctively bends down.

Not one second after the initial gunshot, the entire piece of glass looking out into the road shatters. Immediately after that, a barrage of bullets smash the window into pieces.

April instantly flips herself off the chair, and grabs the table legs with both hands.

"DT!"

"Damn! I'm going to be hunted down by my wife again!"

Because both he and his restaurant owner wife feel that wasting food is a hateful sin, but now isn't the time to worry about that. The two of them use the strength of their shoulders and waists to push the round table onto its side, using it as a shield for the bullets that never stopped coming.

Even the other guests start screaming. Because the entire window was shattered, the bullets fly directly into the shop, destroying vases and bowls. Turning back, April finds Regent hiding behind the decorative gong, and he's even wrapped his arms around the squatting old lady to protect her. As for the

clumsy Bob, he's standing in the middle of the dining hall, standing motionlessly with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

For a moment there she really thought he was dead.

"Bob! It's dangerous!"

"I'll be fine."

"What do you mean, fine, this isn't an endurance contest!"

He's still alive, but he's doing something beyond a normal person's imagination. He shouldn't really think that the bullets would automatically avoid him, right? All the staff are hiding underneath the counter, occasionally peeking out for a look.

"How many of them?"

"There are four people shooting."

The familiar shop staff replies in a low voice.

"Hey hey hey! How many bullets do they have? Do they think they're attacking an army base or something?"

"The only bright side here is that they're not using machine guns! Hey, what's going on here? Has this shop made some terrifying enemy?" "How would I know, go ask my wife!"

"Or could it be robbers?"

If they hadn't even broken in to rob before sweeping the whole place with bullets, then by the time they grab the money and get out of the shop door, they would have probably been long since surrounded by cops. Surely very few robbers would be so bold.

"At least try to fight back! I can't watch this anymore. Hey, April! Where's your usual never-say-die attitude?"

"What the hell are you talking about, what kind of teenager carries a handgun everywhere? On the other hand, DT, why don't you go beat them down with your karate! Since you already got your black belt, dealing with four people should be a piece of cake, right?"

“Since when did I become Japanese?”

The sound of bullets come and go, but before they’ve completely stopped, the lady owner of the shop has already slowly opened the kitchen door and is moving this way, and don’t forget she’s crawling forward in a dark red cheongsam. The white thighs will definitely send tongues wagging, but compared to the sexiness of her body, there’s the spine-chilling look of fury on her face.

April pulls her gaze out the window, pretending not to see it.

“Ah, don’t come here, idiot! It’s really dangerous here! And the floor is covered with glass shards!”

“You’re unbelievable!”

“What’s unbelievable! I was just going to say why there’s a light that keeps shining opposite the road, and then in a few seconds something so terrifying is happening. Kou Li, call the cops quick! Go call the cops!”

“You hooked up another mafia lady again, didn’t you?”

Eh--?

April swallows the yelp that almost leaves her tongue.

“W-w-what nonsense are you talking about! W-why would I do such a thing?”

“If you didn’t, then why the hell are you so nervous? Way I see it, you’ve definitely cheated on me with a mob boss’ mistress again, didn’t you? You perverted blonde-lover!”

What is this!

Kou Li’s expression is still beyond furious, she almost wants to grab her husband and toss him onto the ground.

“Thinking about it, you were like this since high school. All day you’ll just be chasing the blonde, tall sexy ladies. But at the end we finally got married anyway, and I was just feeling relieved too, you sicken me! Even if I’m pregnant now and can’t keep watching you, you can’t fall for another blonde chick again!”

“I told you, I didn’t cheat... What? What did you just say?”

April can’t hold herself any longer, and so she takes a deep breath. She wanted

to yell as loud as she could “Whaaat--?”, but before she could open her mouth, Bob gets one step ahead of her,

“Oh! Congratulations, Kou Li.”

“Thank you, Bob.”

The lady owner smiles, her cheeks reddening.

“Whaaat--?”

But the one yelling isn't April, it's her husband DT.

“N-n-n-now? H-h-h-here?”

“No, no, no, DT. The Japanese have a saying, ‘You can't choose where you fart and grow pimples’.”

“Even if I'm giving birth, it'll be a few months from now!”

April feels it's still best not to get in between their couple's quarrel, and so decides not to say anything, but she starts feeling a little sorry for the people outside attacking them. Surely three out of four of them would never have thought that not only are the people inside the shop not afraid of death. they're also having such a warm conversation.

Although bullets are whooshing over his head, but the Asian man, who just awoke from the shock of the news, is now busy choosing names.

“If it's a girl, I hope her name will have ‘Plum’ or ‘Peach’. If it's a boy, then we'll ask Grandfather to give him a name. How's that? April, what do you think?”

“...I don't care if you want Mango or Lychee...”

What to do? She feels so helpless, the woman she idolizes is actually so childish? No, she should say that both of them are basically childish. April can almost hear the sound of the ideal woman's image in her mind slowly shattering.

“Anyway, let's call the cops, or someone lend me a tank and a helmet!”

“You can't, April.”

“Why not? Since the situation is so dire, just lend me a wok, that'll do.”

If only we can get the cops here, or if possible, the army will be good too.

“Each family takes care of their own business, that’s the rule of this street here.”

“What? Kou Li, there’s no need to drag your relatives into this either...”

“Shh! Quiet. They’re coming.”

She finally understands what they mean by ‘family’. Maybe it’s because they show no sign of resisting, so the enemy relaxes a little, and three of the attackers come in from across the road. The ones who entered are all black-haired Asian men, and they’re yelling all sorts of threats, only in a language they don’t understand.

“Nobodee movee--!”

What, so they speak Pidgin English?”

“Dun move--”

They must be reciting from a combat handbook. Truth is they didn’t have to make the order, everyone was already on the ground to start with, except that certain someone.

When the youngest man meets Bob’s eyes, standing in the middle of the dining hall, he’s shocked into aiming his gun,

“Dun...”

“I won’t move.”

The Demon King crosses his arms before his chest, staring at the other man straight in the face. Those hard-to-describe eyeballs, are shining from behind those brows and lashes.

“At first I was here discussing business over a nice meal, but then you come out and destroy everything? Can you understand the feeling of the dessert you’re eating and the plate it’s one being blown into pieces? Or the helplessness of a fortune cookie and its bamboo basket flying into the air, can you understand that? Is my luck today good or bad? You didn’t even give me the chance to test my luck. Since I’m already so unlucky, why should I move? Besides, the one who should move isn’t me, it’s you! Now leave this restaurant at once!”

Ah~ Bob... Thanks for buying some time.

“But before you leave, there’s one more thing. Give me back my sesame balls! My sesame balls!”

Though she’s beginning to wonder if he’s really trying to buy time.

Bob hangs his walking stick on his arm, furiously yelling in Chinese non-stop, “Sesame balls, sesame balls.”

Just as the attackers who didn’t think the customer in the middle of his meal would freak out like that, April and DT watch the three men carefully. They have five guns, but two of them are holding two, while the remaining one is held by the young man who’s hanging his head in shame over the sesame ball attack. He probably doesn’t have the guts to shoot and kill at close range.

“Listen carefully DT, I’ll take the guy with the bloodshot eyes. Since his eyes are already so tired, I’ll give him a good break, then you rip all the hair off that balding guy’s head, no, I mean, take him down. If you still have energy after that then tackle the young guy, got it?”

“...April, actually I...”

“We move on the count of three! Three, two, one, GO!”

Saying that, she lowers her body and shoots out from behind the table in their blind spot, using her head and shoulders to ram into the bloodshot guy’s stomach, then taking advantage of his loss of balance to sweep him off his feet, causing him to fall flat on his back with his weapon in his arms. Before he falls, though, he loses control of his gun, and his aim is off, sending two bullets through the ceiling.

Just as April is stepping on the fallen bloodshot guy’s arm and kicking away the smoking gun in his right hand, the young man finally regains his senses, pointing his gun at April, though it’s immediately knocked out of his hands by Bob’s raised cane.

With one foot on the bloodshot guy’s left wrist, April pulls a miniature weapon from her pocket, and points it at the spiritless young man,

“Dun move--”

There’s no need to imitate the accent too.

The silver block in her palm has the shape of a handgun, but it really is very petite, and its nozzle is small too, it looks miniature even used by a woman for self-defense. The only person who would raise his hands in resignation faced with such a weapon, is probably this young man here.

“Although I’m extremely against young people wielding weapons, I never said I’m not carrying one myself!”

Whether such a small handgun would actually be of use, is really very doubtful, so she never fired it at anyone. But as a silver item from Grandmother’s entire inheritance, this is definitely a priceless work of art. Every component has been shrunk to as small as it can go, to ensure a perfectly functioning inside to this tiny and intricate exterior. As for the handle of the gun, there are interlocking ivy vibes.

Though it really can’t hold that many rounds, and when it comes to destructive force this weapon has issues too.

She carries it around like a talisman of protection, hoping to solve whatever problems without taking it out. But that’s before today.

“Don’t move! All right, put your hands behind your head like a good boy. At such a short distance, this is really useful, you know!”

But before long, there’s the sound of a gun being cocked! A deep and magnetic voice coldly orders April. Turns out to be the balding Baldy, only he’s completely unharmed.

“You don’t move.”

Really, are you serious? What kind of trickery is this? Just listening to your voice will make me think you’re some kind of hottie!”

“What a rude woman you are, I am a hottie!”

And his English is really fluent, too, the only problem is that head of his. In that I highly recommend you wear a hat.

In her heart she’s wondering if she should throw down the miniature weapon in her hand, and at the same time she can’t figure what happened to DT, logically things shouldn’t have come to this.

“There should be a hag called Edith Bapu here.”

“Hey, where are your manners? Who calls a woman a hag?”

“Shut your trap, brat! Hey, who is Bapu? If you don’t speak up quickly, this brat will lose her life.”

“Hey, where are your manners? Who calls a lady a brat?”

“Stop spouting nonsense, and move your leg away!”

She takes her foot off the bloodshot guy’s wrist, but he has long since fallen unconscious. The young man hurriedly tries to take April’s weapon away. “Really, DT was supposed to take out the baldy, what the hell is he doing?”

“Sorry, April. Truth is I’m weak against balding men.”

“Hah? What the hell? What is this, you pansy! I know you’re scared of spiders and cockroaches, but the problem is I never heard of any adventurer who would be scared of balding middle-aged uncles! You really are a pansy, you!”

The young man who finally came back to his senses took away April’s gun as well, and she clicks her tongue despite herself. If Mother was here, she would definitely faint seeing this. But this is all that useless partner’s fault, from tomorrow onwards I’m calling him ‘useless crap’.

“I’m really sorry, April... I apologize on my husband’s behalf.”

“Ah, no no no, it’s okay, Kou Li, everyone has something they’re scared of.”

Once the other party comes nicely, she’s helpless against them.

“The truth is my husband’s father has that kind of hairstyle as well... and since he was young he has had many conflicts with his father, that’s why he ended up really hating baldies...”

Then in this life he’ll never meet my father.

“However, the husband’s mistake equals the wife’s mistake, husband and wife were always one... so...”

When I feel the difference in the atmosphere and turn around, Kou Li is just jumping into the air, and about thirty centimeters in the air too. She viciously tilts her body and kicks the man in his face, and there’s even the sound of a nose

breaking. She then aims a kick at his lifted chin with her left leg, and that man sprays blood as he slowly falls back. Just when Kou Lu's feet land on the ground, the back of the man's head knocks onto the ground. What spectacular leg kung fu!

"...I'll settle it in his place, is that okay?"

Of course it is! The entire restaurant is ringing with applause too. That sexy slit, could it exist for this kind of attack?

The surviving young man lifts his hands in surrender without being ordered. After seeing the sad state of the shop, the lady owner slides her fingertip down the young man's cheek, saying,

"Little boy, you're something else. How dare you wreck Kou Li's shop like this, I won't let you just walk out of here!"

Her beauty highlight her scariness, the young man is already so scared his face is turning white.

"And we're comrades from the same home country, too, betraying comrades of the same blood is completely unforgivable, you know! All right, hurry up and tell me which germ hired you. As for compensation, we'll figure that out later."

The red fingertip suddenly flicks his cheek.

"I-it's Germany^[2]..."

"There's no need to repeat my words, is there."

Kou Li lifts her right hand up high.

"Wait a sec! He looks like he's about to spill."

"I-it's a German... who told us to threaten the hag!"

The young man looks across the street. Following his gaze, April sees a figure disappearing into the crowd, he has a head of neatly trimmed bright brown hair, and is wearing a long black overcoat. Instead of saying he's part of a quartet, it's better to say he's the German who hired them.

The man suddenly looks back, revealing a unique sharp gaze underneath that short fringe. That's a pair of brown eyes glowing slightly.

“DT, go chase him!”

The Asian father-to-be rushes forth with stumbling footsteps. He should have asked his wife for some of her courage.

“That’s the man who hired you, right? To threaten Mrs Bapu. But why...”

“I’m guessing it’s to prevent me contacting you people.”

The old lady is helped by the French doctor from out behind the gong, using a lot of strength just to get onto her feet. She hands some yellowing papers to April, and then clutches her heart with her empty right hand.

“To get back the Box... It’d be bad if other people got involved, Miss Graves, I have to hand this to you...”

“Are you okay, Mrs Bapu? About the Box, we’ll figure something out, you should just go see the doctor.”

Regent’s expression is clearly saying ‘I am a doctor’ again.

“No... I will... I will go to the hospital... But before that, please look at this.”

April takes the papers from the old lady’s hands and carefully folds them carefully, puts them into her front pocket, then holds her cold hands tightly,

“Don’t worry, I’ll definitely grab ‘The Mirror’s Depth’ back for you, and no matter how far away the original owner is, I’ll return it to them.”

“No, that person isn’t far away?”

“Look at that document carefully.”

“Eh?”

Bob picks up a fallen chair, and sits down slowly. He knocks the floorboards lightly with his cane a few times, and the glass shards around him bounce away. April looks at his stern expression, and opens the first piece of paper.

A familiar name enters her vision.

And it says that after Jacob Bapu dies, the Box, ‘The Mirror’s Depth’ must be returned to its original owner—Hazel Graves.

“...Grandmother was the original owner?”

“When Hazel was around thirty, she discovered ‘The Mirror’s Depth’ in West Asia, and after Mr Bapu begged and begged, she handed the Box to him temporarily for research, but there’s still one very important thing for her to find.”

“But Grandmother is already...”

“That’s right. However, Hazel Graves has chosen you to be her heir.”

Looking at the picture folded in between, April’s round fingertips start shaking. They look so similar.

And Bob’s declaration, is like a clap of thunder over her head.

“The owner of the Box is you! April.”

References

1. [↑](#) Apparently said in German?
2. [↑](#) She had asked ‘which fellow’, which sounds like ‘Germany’ in Japanese. Though they’re supposed to be speaking English, lol.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 - Berlin

The male receptionist has a mustache that looks like it's been drawn on with a brush, his black hair combed immaculately backwards, while his face shines as though it's been covered with clear glue.

"I want to change hotels, please help me carry my luggage."

"Very well, may I ask where you want to send it to?"

Even though the customer names a hotel that's completely different in style, he's not at all surprised.

"I hope you won't misunderstand, I'm not unsatisfied with the service here, it's just that I... don't like that."

Straight up the front of the large hall decorated with yellow flowers and lighting, there's a huge '卐' hanging there. Soldiers that ruin her mood are walking all over as though they own the place, and that irritates her to no end.

"And this hotel is so beautiful too, what a pity."

The other person just smiles silently, but deep in his heart he agrees with her opinion.

"Will you be attending the auction?"

"Of course I will, it's for that reason I'm here in Berlin."

Revisiting Germany after three years, it feels like the atmosphere is filled with tension. There's nothing on the road but green military vehicles, and pedestrians skirt around them. The soldiers on the road are exceptionally many, even children are wearing similarly colored clothes.

And, the '卐' badge is hanging everywhere she goes.

"Actually, isn't it okay if you just treat it as the Buddhist sign?"

"You really are very easygoing."

“...What, by that do you mean you’re looking on me, an adult? You’re really very uncute!”

“Just standing and watching as the mastermind escape from right in front of you, does that count as an adult?”

DT’s expression looks like he’s choking on a dumpling, while his mouth repeats excuses. The chin that was beaten up four days ago still has a huge Sa***pas^[1] on it.

After Edith rested for two days, and recovered her health, the whole party followed her on a flight back to France, and then sent her back to her daughter and son-in-law’s side before taking the land route into Germany. Of course, the single person rooms on the trains are more comfortable than the seats on a plane, and the baggage check isn’t so stringent either.

But that’s not the only reason they chose the land route. Because she needs time to slowly think, without being disturbed by the neighboring passengers and the airplane crew.

They want to snatch a wooden box with great power that does not belong in this world from enemy hands, and of all the chances, their enemy is Germany, the country with the dictator. Although Bob said there would be some locals helping, but with so few people, how can they go against the Nazis?

Her dark brown fringe is plastered to the glass window, and she sighs without the other two hearing. There’s no way she will let DT and Regent see such a discouraged April Graves.

The European spring scenery outside the window is really beautiful, just like in the movies and albums, and not dull in the slightest. Especially those old castles surrounded by greenery such as mountain forests, that’s something you’ll never see in America.

But they have to complete the mission before they can enjoy the pleasure of a vacation, and experience the foreign atmosphere.

Since the picture is in black and white, she can’t see the actual color, but the patterns on the side and the decorations that seem to have been added on later, look very similar to something she saw before.

That's the box that spewed blue flames on the day Grandmother died.

"I say, DT, do you think Grandmother is really dead?"

She is careful not to let the coffee spill, then she asks her partner, who's falling asleep.

"...Mn? You mean Hazel? Why would you ask so suddenly?"

Asking him is a waste of breath.

As for Henry Regent, reading the German papers, his head is bowed as he says,

"Although I didn't attend the funeral, I did hear that the old mansion caught on fire."

"That's right, it was bought just last year. Seems like a building from the Civil War area, Grandmother really liked it."

"I heard Bob mention that... It's such a pity, that her body was never found."

"That's right, because everything was burnt down completely, and I mean everything. Put that with the too-high temperature, and the house, furniture and body were all melted into one clump, maybe even with the box that I saw. But can this sort of thing really happen? It wasn't a black powder warehouse, or a factory, it was just a very normal fire! How can it burn until even the hair and bones disappeared?"

April moves her gaze away from the photograph, and looks at the green scenery and goatherds flying past.

"Do you think such a thing can happen?"

"Stop that, when you say it like that, Hazel won't be able to gain enlightenment in peace--"

"...That's true, maybe."

Although she never mentions her grandmother's cause of death again, but whenever she looks at her black-and-white photo, April will remember that nightmarish scene.

"What are these words and patterns carved into the decorative part here?"

"Mn—When I saw it there weren't these decorations, they were probably

added on afterwards. Forgetting the words for now, this beast looks a lot like Mr Bapu's investigation target, Ishtar's lion^[2]!"

"Isn't that from BC?"

"That's right."

"How is that possible! There's no way a wooden box from BC can stay intact until now, but if it was stone or bronze, then that's another matter, of course."

Regent folds the paper into four, and tosses it onto the empty seat beside him. There are only the three of them in the train coach at night, so there's still some space to spare.

"If there were preservation measures taken, then it's not impossible, though it's eighty per cent likely that it was copied on later. Only those words carved on the edges, it looks a lot like Greek. Even if it's not exactly the same, at the very least it's related."

"And Mr Bapu had deciphered this too... The door shall open for pure water, only that can open... When they say 'pure water', it shouldn't mean holy water, right? Or maybe some special seawater from somewhere? Or some secret river or lake..."

"That's not important."

Regent uses a rare tone of forcefulness, cutting her off. April stares at him, feeling a bit weird, and she ends up attracted to the black iris behind those lenses. A shudder runs down her spine.

That's her first time noticing that this man's eyes are not like most people's. There are plenty of people of Earth with black hair and eyes, such as Asians like DT and Kou Li and almost all Africans are like that, but though they're called black, upon closer inspection they're actually mixed with dark brown and grey.

But his are different, they're completely and utterly black.

"W-why... Sorry, my throat's a little uncomfortable."

Trying to hide the shock in her heart, April clears her throat before asking,

"'That's not important'? Why would you say that? The rights to the Box belong to me now, right, and isn't it natural for the owner to know what it is?"

The French doctor immediately returns to him calm and composed tone, continuing as though preaching,

“The person who found it was indeed Hazel, and her heir is April, yes. As long as no country or organization insist that it’s their cultural heritage, then on paper, you’re the owner. The problem now is there’s no way to determine if you having it is the best option. Think about it, even the person who discovered ruins, may not necessarily be the rightful owner.”

“Are you saying Grandmother is nothing but a robber?”

“How could I! Hazel was an impressive woman, she never planned on using the Box for anything unscrupulous. Back then there were quite a few people who wanted it, they were probably more than willing to pay for it. But Hazel Graves didn’t use it to earn a fortune. She refused to hand such strength over to any one country or organization, and she didn’t even reveal her contributions to the world, instead she secretly handed the Box over to Mr Bapu, in the hopes of discovering its secrets.”

The sleeping DT’s head is sure shaking violently, and his mouth is wide open in an unseemly manner.

“I wish to do that too.”

“No.”

Regent shakes his head dejectedly, and then pushes his glasses upwards with his pointer finger.

“Since ambitious people already know of its existence, then this time we can’t handle it that way anymore, no matter what we must prevent this from happening. We have to grab the Box and Key from the Nazis before they put it to use, and bury it somewhere safe as soon as possible, to prevent it from falling into any ambitious hands... Please promise me, April. If we successfully get ‘The Mirror’s Depth’, I hope you will bury it where no one can find it.”

“But Regent...”

“That’s something humans must never touch.”

That line is exactly like Grandmother’s dying words.

Persuaded by the agitated French doctor, April can only nod her head in agreement. Even if it was her normally, she would surely fight back fiercely. Her personality just happens to be the type that if someone forces her to go east, she would go west for the hell of it. But today she turned into an obedient April Graves, something even she can't imagine.

But—

“Why do I feel that your words make sense?”

“You think I make sense? Maybe it's because I'm desperately trying to convince you?”

The train slowly approaches the tall roof made of metal wires woven into a web.

“Because I'm desperately trying to convince you to believe me, no, I have no other choice but to make you believe me, because this is all real, all of it is the truth. Deep inside, you're suspecting why I have this knowledge, right? Maybe you won't believe me... But actually, I... April, I...”

Just then, the train starts braking, the brakes and the rails rubbing against each other. Following the screeching sounds, the train slides into the station. Regent smiles cynically at himself, and pulls apart the bright curtains on the glass window.

When the party is getting into the cab sent there by the hotel, they see a black car forcing the white car backwards, and stopping in front of them. DT mumbles happily,

“Whoaa—We're pretty welcomed here, it's a white Benz fighting a black Benz!”

“Actually it doesn't matter what type of car the cab is.”

At that moment the door to the black Benz is opened, and another man in a black army uniform steps out, while some of the people who were originally on the sidewalk lower their heads and avoid his gaze. He readjusts the skull badge on his hat, and curls his lips upwards as he says to April,

“Young miss, where are you headed?”

“...We plan to change hotels.”

“Oh~ Why is that?”

The soldier who shrugs exaggeratedly has a red arm badge with the ‘卐’ sign on his left arm, and that golden hair tucked behind his ear shines in the sunlight. From the way he smiles superficially, it's obvious to see he's happily taunting these foreigners.

“That is Berlin's highest quality hotel. Even the President believes that it can satisfy a noble lady from the USA, like you. Ah, however...”

Those blue eyes, filled with a sense of superiority, glance once at the Asian American.

“...Your comrade might have a less comfortable time staying there.”

“That should have nothing to do with you, right?”

“How can you say so, Frau Graves. After all, for the extent of your stay in Germany, I am under orders to take care of your daily needs. Right, please get onto the car! Wherever you want to go, I'll send you there. Goodness, what's wrong with that Frenchman? His movements are just like our local soccer scene, with no absolutely laws to speak of.”

“According to Regent, the soccer in this country knows only how to defend, and is no fun to watch at all, even boring sometimes. He even said, although German soccer is really not that good, but unless you've reincarnated a couple times, you won't understand it.”

Feeling impatient with the words that sound respectful but are in fact really rude, April ducks past the Benz and continues walking forward.

“If you like invigilating us so much, then go ahead, so it turns out the infamous SS are pretty free in the daytime too.”

“There's no such thing!”

The car keeps up to her speed, following from behind, while the man strides around April to face her head-on, blocking her way.

“Ensuring that the auctions runs smoothly, is an important mission for us officers of the Cultural Division, and so honorable guests from far away like Young Miss must be treated as perfectly as we possibly can...”

“If you still won’t get out of my way, I’ll make all your male characteristics disappear, you know! Oh, dear! So sorry, were my words just now too low-class? It’s just that my German isn’t that good.”

“Please don’t say so. Your German is impeccable! Only you have some uneducated commoner’s accent, perhaps because you chose the wrong teacher.”

Don’t tell me this type of person can only talk cynically?

This man who followed them from the moment they got off the train, is an SS lieutenant around thirty-years-old. To April, he doesn’t deserve to stand on top of the crowds yet, but if you just look at his appearance, it’s not hard to understand how he climbed to so high a position despite his youth.

Herm Coruna is a classic German, and he has Hitler’s favorite superior genes. There’s probably no one more suited to a SS uniform than him! When he stood on the train platform and smiled confidently, April immediately despised him.

The three of them became VIPs at the art auction held in Berlin. This auction, meant for auctioning off the paintings and other things the Nazis have been collecting, has already been held several times this year. There are many guests from abroad, too, so this is the most logical excuse to enter the borders. Truth is, Regent has some documents from Bob too, who hopes to save some other exploited works.

When the party walked down the train stairs holding their lightest luggage, this blonde-haired green-eyed young man was already waiting for them with a smile. He says Bob’s rare surname, and then holds out his right hand, saying, “You are the representatives, yes?” But he only shook Regent and April’s hands, while he arrogantly pretended not to notice DT, the easterner.

“Glad to meet you, Frau Graves. I am Lieutenant Herm Coruna from the Cultural Division. It may a little late to say this, but we deeply regret your grandmother’s passing. Please do not be too sorrowful, she once sponsored the building of the large church...”

“Heavens, that’s ancient history from two years ago, thank you for remembering it.

Coruna’s brow creases slightly, but he immediately reverts to his relaxed smile. Apparently his job was to greet the foreign guests over the course of the auction, but the truth is his main duty is to watch them. Looks like the three of them are the last set of guests joining tonight’s party.

“Frau Graves, this way please, we have prepared a car for you.”

DT says in a small voice, uneasily,

“Hey, did you use an alias?”

“No.”

“Then why does that guy keep calling you ‘Frau, Frau’^[3]?”

DT doesn’t speak a word of German.

“But Chinese letters don’t trouble me!”

That’s nothing to be proud of.

But from this they can tell that the annoying watchman has, to some extent, some understanding of English. Although he can understand perfectly pronounced English, he can’t keep up when it comes to dialects or if they speak too fast, especially some Chinese-or French-mixed whispers. From the moment they were brought to a hotel near Bradenburg, they had the feeling of being watched.

Regent said he wanted to look for his friends to get some intel, and he seems to have eluded the watchman, but April and the others, who felt uncomfortable there and decided to change locations, were unfortunately caught in the act by Coruna.

When they push past the crowd ahead and move forward, the SS lieutenant chats to them as he catches up. As for the passersby who bump against him, all of them lower their heads and frown, never meeting his gaze.

“Oh, dear~ I didn’t think your companion would be an Asian, how special, the

more I see him the harder it is to believe that he's in the same species as us! We plan to open a large-scale cultural museum in Dahlem, maybe we should have him tie his hair into knot and stand there as an exhibit, so everyone else can enjoy the sight."

DT, who doesn't understand German, looks at Coruna sideways, asking in a small voice. The aura the other man is giving him makes him feel slightly uncomfortable.

"What's that guy saying? And he's looking at me all deviously too."

"He says you're very mesmerizing, and keeps praising you too."

"Walei—W-w-w-w-what is that! So disgusting~"

"Looks like he's finally found his dream lover, I think he prefers men over women, y'know."

"Damn--!"

DT's expression looks like he's drunk vinegar, and then he puts his palms together, pleading solemnly.

"April, I beg you, please explain it clearly to him for me! Tell him I have a beautiful wife at home, and I'm lucky enough to be becoming a father soon."

The man who mistook DT for a Japanese, seems even more interested after seeing him in a pleading pose.

"What is he saying?"

"He's begging me to never tell you that he's better with the ladies than you are, because he doesn't want you to feel unhappy."

"What?"

"Maybe you German can't imagine it, but in New York there was once a shootout between the gangs over him. Because the mob boss' daughter and mistress fell head over heels in love with him at the same time. Oh, yeah, they just happened to look just like you, they had shiny blonde hair and buff bodies too. Truth be told, it's really very weird, ladies like that often automatically chase after him."

“...Ladies like that...”

The lieutenant holds his chin as he contemplates, but before long he’s back to his cheerful mood.

There’s no way they can do anything with a stalker on their tails, so they must quickly get rid of him, and collect more intel.

“DT, you be the bait and lead him away!”

“I don’t wanna, why must it be me?”

“Because he thinks you’re mesmerizing, and he really admires you! As long as I’m with you, he’ll definitely stick to me like glue.”

“Stop kidding! If that happens, one wrong move and I’ll fall into his clutches! And then who knows what’ll happen to my modesty?”

“If that happens, then you might as well give up, and wait to be put up on display at a cultural museum, so that the people can enjoy you.”

And he has to tie his hair into a knot, too.

“Also, you force me to the Nazis, then where are you going, and to do what? If you’re running away on your own to eat some delicacy, this time I’ll definitely break with you!”

“I want to go see the lions, sheesh!”

“Lions? Ah—That’s right! There seems to be a zoo near the station.”

Her partner sighs in defeat, and walks over the Benz approaching slowly. He puts his hand on the passenger seat door handle, using the tone of an elementary school teacher to say,

“How are you? Thank you, I’m fine. I’m getting onto the car, do you want to get on too?”

“Yes, I do.”

Coruna understands these words, and he hurriedly helps April open the car door. After making sure she’s in the back seat, he enters from the other end. Just as he closes the car door, DT in front immediately gives the driver a kick, and takes the chance to kick him onto the road.

“Mister Customer—Where to--?”

April looks sideways at the panicked lieutenant and then quickly gets out of the car, while DT slams onto the Benz’ accelerator. In the backseat, Coruna seems to have done a front flip.

“Didn’t I tell you, Lietunant Herm Coruna. My partner really likes beautiful buff blonde ladies.”

At the very least, she will let him, in that certain period of time, experience communication between different cultures.

As for April, she jumps into the white Benz before the driver who was kicked down can get back onto his feet. This time she really did jump onto a taxi.

“To the museum!”

“Which museum?”

“Eh? The one with the lion!”

“Oh~ The lion, is it? That’s the oldest place in Germany. Did you know? That place was built by Friedrich Wilhelm IV.”

And then, the white Benz changes direction for an unknown reason.

There are indeed lions here. No, there are probably tigers and gorillas too.

Having been taken to the entrance of the zoo, April gets back into the back seat, she must tell the driver once again, that she wants to go to the opposite direction.

“...When did I say I wanted to go to the zoo?”

“But miss, weren’t you saying ‘lion, lion’ really agitatedly? I thought that you were a lion enthusiast, so I hit the gas and flew here.”

“I wanted to see the carvings on the Ishtar door! And then confirm the Babylonian writings!”

The gentle-faced driver says, “Then let’s get to the large church first.” Saying that, he passes by under the large door. Although it’s daytime on an average day, there’s no sense of liveliness on the streets at all. Not because the doors

and windows on the buildings are closed, neither is it because there are no passersby on the street, but still there's none of that atmosphere, of people enjoying their daily lives.

"It just feels like this country is even colder than before."

"There's no such thing. Not only are all the people united as one, whenever it comes to the parade every Sunday, the roads are filled with passionate citizens! Compared to not long ago when the economy was bad, everyone is filled with hope!"

"...Is that so?"

"That's right, the paper flowers and petals people toss during the parades gather into mountains!"

Perhaps all she can say is that their values are different. In the eyes of an American, the women wearing dark clothes and walking on the roads with stiff expressions, as well as the children wearing small SIZE army uniforms with a '卐' badge pinned somewhere or another on their bodies, these are all very strange sights.

And those soldiers, who are either enjoying their rare days off or simply walking on the road expressionlessly, she can't tell which, they make her feel indescribably uneasy.

"Maybe I'm overthinking things... Wait a sec!"

Seeing the face of the person walking past the taxi, April moves her body on the seat in surprise. She desperately shirks her head under the window, looks like she wasn't seen by the other party. He's a soldier wearing a uniform, not expressionless but looking furious as he walks. He should be over 25 years old, right? If it weren't for the wrinkles between his brows, he should look even younger.

Like Coruna, he is also a member of the SS. The full-black officer uniform and the contrasting white gloves, are especially piercing to the eyes. But compared to those two colors, there's something that's making April's heart feel even tighter.

It's that brown color.

“What’s the matter? Miss.”

If they suddenly slowed down, he might get suspicious, so the driver keeps his foot on the accelerator as he talks to his passenger at the back,

“No matter how cold-hearted the SS are, they still wouldn’t simply apprehend a foreign tourist, so you don’t have to hide your head so low! Or is he your long-lost lover?”

“No way!”

That is indeed the exact same pale brown.

That hair color is the same too, it changes to golden brown under the sunlight, but the most important thing is those eyes. Although all she got is a shocked glance both back then and just now, but that pale brown, and those unique, eye-catching silver-shining irises, have left a deep impression on her. There shouldn’t be a lot of people with those eyes.

It’s him.

She’s sure of it, it’s that man.

It’s that German, who paid that Asian trio and asked them to destroy Kou Li’s restaurant; it’s the man who attacked us to threaten Madam Bapu. Although there was an entire street between them, she would never mistake those eyes.

April bit her lips lightly. So he’s a Nazi, and an officer in the SS, too.

“Oh—He really is handsome, though he gives off an unapproachable aura. That sir over there is really popular in the nightclubs, but if he always has that look on his face, no woman will dare approach him... Eh? How rare!”

The talkative driver looks at the SS soldier walking into the distance from the rearview mirror, and then says in surprise.

“What?”

“Ah! Actually it’s nothing, I just felt that soldier is a bit different, like there’s something weird somewhere...”

He grabs the rearview mirror with his right hand, forcefully turning it to an angle where the customer can see, too.

“See that? You see, his hair is brown, isn’t it? Although it’s a bit far, but his eyes aren’t blue, are they? I thought that was a bit rare. After all, the SS directly under His Excellency the President are all blonde-haired and blue-eyed.”

“Since you mentioned it... It’s true.”

Although she really hates Herm Coruna, but his appearance as a German is really very perfect, with white skin, blue eyes, a straight nose and blonde hair that sparkles under the sun.

She’d brushed past some soldiers at the station and the hotel, too, but people without these characteristics were always wearing grey or green uniforms. The ones who could wear the black uniform and walk proudly on the street, were only a small portion of carefully chosen people.

If they were to follow that ridiculous, stupid rule, then in the whole Graves family only Dianne would qualify. Compared to the girl with honey-blonde hair, be it Papa, Mama, April, or even her amazing grandmother, Hazel Graves, all of them lose to her.

“Being able to get the acknowledgement of those older, more experienced superiors at his age, that’s really very rare, surely he must have some shocking special ability, or maybe he comes from some distinguished family.”

“That’s right, and he’s an idiotic young master too.”

Although her words are calm, April’s heart is beating especially fast. It was that man who defaced the restaurant, and forced us to hide under the table. All because he didn’t want Edith to get back the box, and didn’t want her to have a chance to discuss with Bob.

And he took the chance to scare DT and me too, so we would reject this case.

At that moment she suddenly feels all the blood rushing to her head, her face and ears reddening in fury.

Too bad for him, of all the people he had to mess with me! How dare he threaten me, April Graves.

April thinks, and even her ear lobes have probably gone scarlet. To make sure the driver doesn’t notice, when she feels the taxi shaking a bit as it turns left, she

forces herself to ask calmly,

“Just wondering, where do you think that man is headed?”

“Uh—Since he’s walking in the same direction as us, perhaps he’s headed to the Bergammon Museum like you? If he didn’t turn here from that corner just now, then maybe he’s going to the large church to pray.”

“I just didn’t think that SS officers would be so interested in the arts.”

“If only he was really interested...”

Finally, before she can ask what he means by that, the taxi has already stopped on the gravel road. Right in front of her is a stern-looking building.

Seems like the lion is probably some treasure for the northern archeological museum, but apparently the Nazis changed its direction starting from this year, moving and getting rid of many art pieces, so no one has any idea what’s left.

April gets off the car slowly, turning around to look at the dusty road.

She considers what she should do now, and has already counted to five deep in her throat.

She had agreed to rendezvous with Regent at the auction that starts at eight, so she must investigate more clues about the Box’ decorative parts’ words and symbols before that.

Past the pillars spreading outwards like a pair of wings, she walks into the inner main hall illuminated by rays of light shining through the high window. It could be because the air conditioning isn’t working, because even though it’s spring, the air feels cold.

Coming to a large hall with a domed ceiling, there are many types of carvings arranged between the many upright pillars, but upon scrutinizing them one by one, anyone will notice that they’re mostly reproductions. Why on earth would they display reproductions? April is starting to get confused, so she hurriedly shakes her head.

Now is not the time to think of these things.

Technically she should head for the archeological museum in the north wing, and investigate the words carved on the side of the box, so why is she in the old museum in the south wing, holding her breath as she listens carefully to a certain man's footsteps?

About twenty meters ahead, the man in the military uniform walks across the hall, heading for a path to the right. Although the other routes have Ancient Roman, Greek, Western Asia or similarly simple-to-understand signs in order, that path is the only one without an eye-catching sign. Which area does that exhibit belong to, then?

Seeing as the man's silhouette will soon vanish, April immediately runs to the entrance. And she had long since taken off those high heels, which would not only make loud, alerting footsteps, but were also so high they made her very uncomfortable. Thankfully there aren't any visitors here, if someone reported a tourist running around in silk stockings, she would definitely be thrown out of the museum.

She passes by the dark tunnel where the light from the ceiling window doesn't reach. The exhibition room is bigger than April imagined, but right now she has no choice but to hide beside the stone statue. Because the target she is following is just standing before the glass cabinet in the middle of the room.

From where April is hiding, she can't determine what's displayed inside the cylindrical glass cabinet, but she can see the military man taking out a piece of paper that looks like his ID, trying to take away the thing in the glass case.

He has his hands on his hips, ordering the young staff member something. Maybe he can't quite hide the impatience in his heart, because his tone has become more rough and violent too.

"I told you to get me the key now!"

"I just said, the professor passed away at the end of last year. That's why the mayor ordered that the rights to all the collections were to be handed over to the vice curator, so I can't hand it to you!"

The staff just won't give in no matter what, bravely facing the armed SS soldier.

“I heard that that’s the party’s principle, if I simply let you take away something precious, it will cause us a lot of trouble. Just like last time there was a large-scale moving of over a hundred pieces of art, that was forced on us without getting our consent... To this day, the government has yet to tell us what that batch of art was for and where they went. Although we can’t confirm that our research can bring any sort of benefit to the party...”

Looks like it’s not just works of art like drawings and carvings, the Nazis have collected all the research information in one place too. Although speaking of that, what on earth does that man want to take away? April carefully moves her body, trying to see what’s inside the glass case.

“Since you are Professor Baldwin’s student, you should at least know that that belongs to the Deuter family. I am Rikhiart^[4] Deuter, I have all the legal rights to it, so technically I have the right to take it back.”

Now she finally knows the name of the man in the SS officer uniform... the suspect who destroyed Kou Li’s restaurant in Chinatown. Rikhiart Deuter is the man with pale brown eyes shining silver.

She repeats the name in her mouth, feeling pissed off, and there’s some contempt mixed in there too. German names are still so hard to pronounce, although they are easier than Dutch names, she’ll admit that much.

The bespectacled young staff member stammers,

“I did hear about that... I just didn’t think that Deuter’s descendants... would actually join the SS...”

“Even if I gave up on it, the main squad will still come for it, by then it’ll be too late if you panic. It’s all over if that falls into those people’s hands, you should be very clear how it’ll be used in that case! Alright, quickly hand the key over, open the door to the cabinet. If the main squad comes enquiring, you just have to say that you returned it to the owner and you’ll be fine. No, even if you tell them I snatched it away, it’s okay.”

“I can’t do it!”

The staff member stubbornly shakes his head in refusal. He raises his head to look at the man who calls himself Deuter, and even glances at the short sword

and pistol attached to his waist, then he grips his hands tightly and withstands the pressure before him. He may be thinking that for daring to disobey an SS officer's orders, it's only natural even if he were shot to death right now.

April quietly reaches her hand into her shirt. The silver talisman that she got from Grandmother has the same temperature as her skin.

That staff member is a professional researcher. Disregarding his personal safety, he determinedly protects the historical artifacts. People who don't respect art have no right to touch works of art.

April holds the silver weapon lightly and waits for the chance to strike. The exhibit must never fall into Nazi hands! If Grandmother were here, she would probably help that staff member too. Besides, Rikhiart Deuter turned her favorite Chinese restaurant into a wreck, she still has that score to settle with him.

"The German over there..."

She pops out from behind the stone statue, but only takes one step before she stops in spite of herself. Because Rikhiart Deuter is just grabbing a chair and smashing it with all his strength into the old cabinet.

The sounds of glass shattering, echoes throughout the previously silent museum.

"T-that... man..."

After cleaning off the remaining glass shards, Deuter swings the chair again.

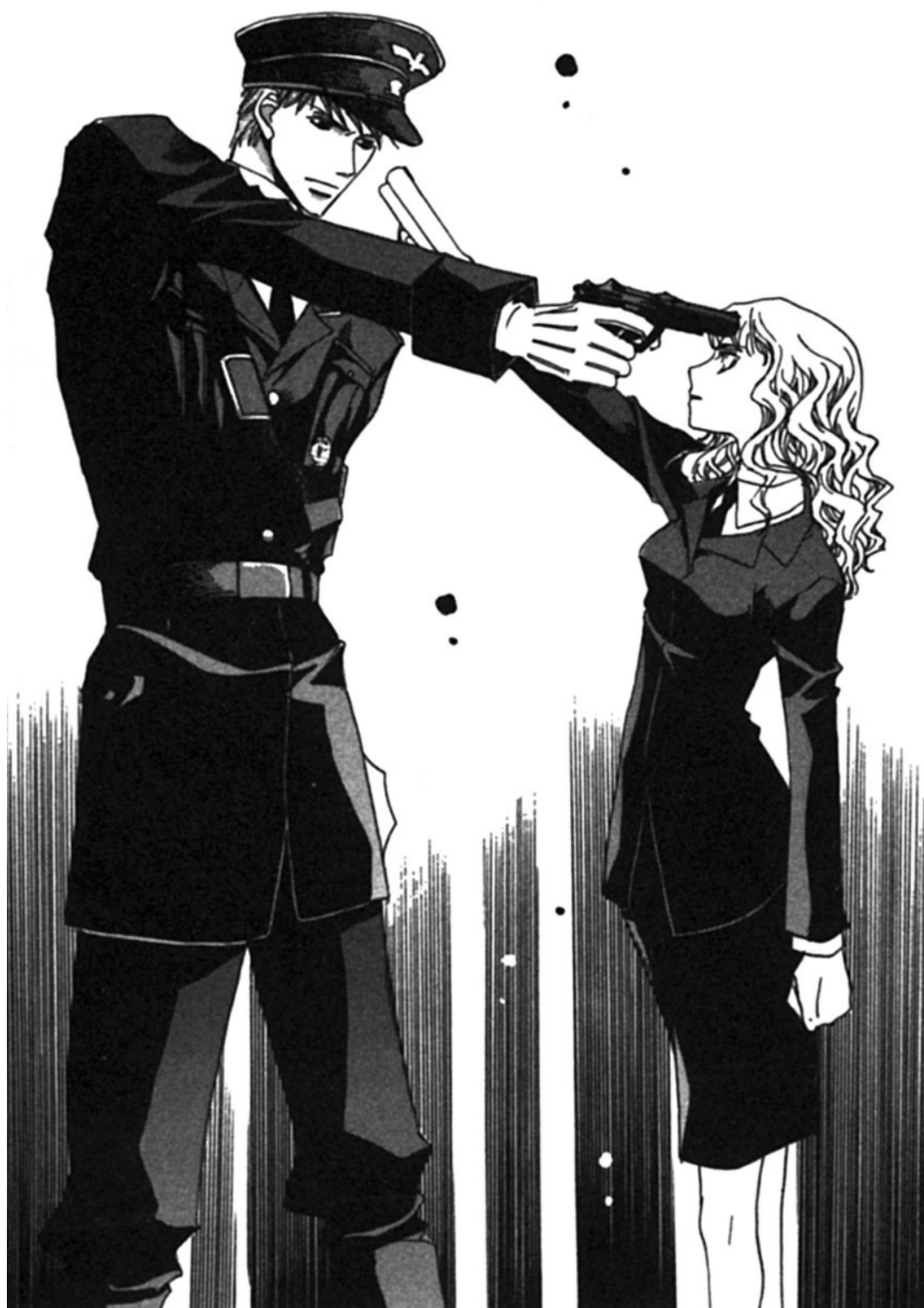
April rushes over to him. Although her strides aren't big, she has never hated a person so much. And it just so happens that in this emergency situation, she's wearing a very feminine, but very inconvenient outfit. The long tight skirt that reaches beyond her knees forces her to run with little steps like a lady. If she doesn't stop him as soon as possible, the exhibit will get damaged.

"Stop that right now!"

"Who's there?"

Just as she raises the mini handgun, the man's right hand slides to his waist, and with a speed that comes with practice he puts the black muzzle between her

eyes.



The difference in height between the two is too big, April's hand can't even reach his forehead.

Those memorable brown eyes, are staring at her without hesitation. The will hidden in those irises, shines with a light different from the skull pinned on the middle of his hat.

“...So it’s just a brat?”

“Eighteen years old counts as a brat in Berlin, huh? I’ve seen children even younger than that, pretending to be you sad, idiotic soldiers and marching.”

A cold sweat has broken out on April’s back. If his pointer finger just twitches a little, she will immediately tell the world sayonara. Even so, she doesn’t stop spouting big words, so much so that even she feels she’s brave.

“Eighteen years old counts as a brat in whichever country.”

“But then who’s the one holding a dangerous item at the brat?”

His expression not changing in the slightest, Deuter decisively lowers his gun. It’s just that as soon as his previously stretched straight arm and shoulder relax, there’s immediately the deafening sound of an alarm going off. However, his left arm is still holding the chair leg. His cold and distant gaze moves away from April, and to the display cabinet he’s so concerned about.

April’s finger is still on the trigger.

“Stop! Or I’ll shoot! People who don’t understand the value of art have no right to touch them!”

But Deuter just ignores her warning, determinedly pulling the long exhibit out of the cabinet. It’s about 60 centimeters long, and at first she thought it was some thick stick or cylinder, but the front end seems to be a flattened sphere.

Turns out they’re half-curved up fingers. Looking at it, it should be the arm of a plaster statue.

Its color is very white, to be accurate, it’s a disgusting pale white.

“If you want to shoot then fore ahead, I won’t mind!”

“Don’t say that, I mind a lot. Listen carefully! Put that plaster statue back into the case now, things should always go back to where they belong. Trying to take away a work of art in broad daylight, people will say you’ve brave but brainless, you know!”

“Work of art?”

Deuter laughs for the first time, and it feels like he’s laughing at her.

“You said this is a work of art?”

“That’s right, otherwise what do you say it is? Don’t tell me you’re going to say it’s a giant white asparagus?”

“This is an arm.”

“That’s what I said! It’s part of a plaster statue...”

“Oh, this is not plaster, little miss. This is a bona fide human arm.”

The officer returns to his previous expressionlessness, and hands the pale ‘arm’ to her. The fingers just happen to be facing her, and it feels like they’re waving at her.

“You can feel it for yourself.”

April then assumes that he’s trying to distract her, in order to create a chance to escape, but then he doesn’t look nervous at all, as though he doesn’t mind being held at gunpoint.

“What is this, using an arm to trick children like this...”

“Since you’re an ambassador of justice who believes in protecting art, you should be able to tell right away if it’s plaster or not, right? Or are you so disgusted that you don’t dare to touch it?”

Feeling the blood rush right to her temples, April throws caution to the winds and reaches out her left hand, using her finger to touch that arm’s fingers. On one end is her own clammy finger, on the other is the supposedly man-made pure white fingers.

“Ah!”

Not just the front end, she even slides her hand to the half-hidden palm, and the wrist with even the veins simulated.

It’s smooth and hard, but it still has a bit of springiness, so she can be sure that it’s neither wood nor stone, and this cold feeling is like fat without blood circulation, so it’s hard to imagine that it’s made of rubber.

“...It’s wax?”

“Didn’t I already tell you? This isn’t man-made, it’s the arm of a human who

died more than a hundred years ago.”

She instinctively pulls her hand back, but not out of fear upon finding out that it's a body. She's seen that kind of thing countless times before, be it smugglers who were shot full of holes and died on the spot, or colleagues who were blinded by their greed and fell into traps. She's even seen grave robbers who were cursed and rotted until they were unrecognizable in front of everybody, though no one can be sure if it was really because of the curse anyway.

If it's a body long since dead, then she's seen countless mummies or skeletons lying in their coffins too.

It's just that this part of the body has just been preserved too perfectly. Unless it was frozen in the south pole, otherwise a human body over a hundred years old can never survive in this form until now...

“How is this possible? Unless this is a preserved specimen?! But no, if it's a specimen, the surface should be dry.”

“That's why I wanted to borrow it from this museum, so I can solve this mystery!”

The staff member who was shocked into sitting on the floor helplessly by the duo's rough behavior, says in a trembling voice,

“We were researching... exactly what kind of preservation it had been through, to survive so perfectly like this for several hundred years. Oh, God! Miss, please don't shoot! It's still okay if we're lucky and you hit someone, but just thinking that the stray bullet might harm this precious specimen...”

She didn't think that he considered the exhibit more important than his life, as expected of a scholar, worthy of her respect.

“I don't care if you want to unravel whatever shocking secrets, but the most important thing is that it's not misused.”

“That's why! I'll never hand it to you, an SS officer...!”

“It's not like I voluntarily wear this uniform!”

Deuter immediately takes off his black uniform jacket, and wraps the pure white arm in it roughly. He glances at the staff member, sitting on the floor, and

then turns around to head towards the entrance, completely ignoring April.

“Listen up, you, the army squadron who call themselves the Cultural Department will come any time now, the fastest if not today then tomorrow, you just tell them this arm was stolen, and if possible you will report to the police now so they can handle it.”

“What do you want it for?”

The bespectacled staff member interrupts him. But Rikhiart Deuter ignores his question, putting on his army hat properly and then preparing to leave.

“If by then the professor’s family, or you are suspected of hiding this arm, then you just say I did it, it’s okay.”

“How are you going to deal with it? Are you going to hand it over to the Nazis?”

“Me, hand it to them?”

The lieutenant again laughs self-condescendingly,

“The president might be very happy, but first I might die by my ancestor’s curse.”

“If you say that, then that is the treasure your ancestor left... Wait, what’s that sound?”

April is distracted mid-sentence by the sudden sound.

Over ten different sets of footsteps are coming from the other end of the hall. Deuter ‘tsk’s lightly, his hand also moving to the handgun on his waist.

“Why are they even earlier than I expected.”

He lightly raises his chin, signaling everyone to leave. The ‘main squad’ he was talking about is now jogging through the pillars in the large hall, coming their way. Seeing that the enemy will soon show up on the other end of the tunnel, the staff member makes an important decision, and stands up.

“Come with me.”

“You guys should leave quickly, there’s no need to get caught up in this meaningless conflict.”

“Lieutenant, no, Mr Deuter, please come over here. You two can leave through the back door.”

Those words take the man holding the arm completely by surprise, and in that split second he reveals his emotions on his face. The staff member goes around to the back of the glass case, stumbling, and there’s a little door the same color as the wall.

“This is a secret door, and you can take that with you. I’ll say it was stolen, taken away in the night, but I hope you will never hand the Key and the Box over to those people with bad intentions.”

Deuter nods his head in agreement, and then pushes open the door heading for the control room.

“Listen up, I’ll say it again. If you are suspected, tell them my name...”

“I won’t sell you out.”

The eyes behind those round and thick lenses narrow.

“Leave, quickly.”

There’s another door in the control room, which looks like it leads to the backyard. If they go past the office tables, they can use a crack a few centimeters large to peek outside.

“Relax, come on!”

Soldiers don’t seem to have this exit surrounded yet. The two give the budding grassy ground a sideways glance, and then go past the uneven backyard. Deuter holds the arm, wrapped up in his uniform, underneath his arm, and his right hand lingers around his waist, so he can draw his gun at any moment. As for his left hand, it’s holding April’s, pulling her along without hesitation according to his own speed. Since she doesn’t seem to be out of breath trying to keep up, Deuter forgot about that special bit of attention he should give to ladies.

“I think there’s no need for a gunfight, right?”

“It should be... Get down! Be careful not to get discovered!”

At the front entrance to the old museum, there are so many cars they’ve almost completely blocked the wide door out of sight, around a dozen of them.

Soldiers in green uniforms scatter in all directions, looking bored, so though the scale is big, there's not much of a sense of tension. Deuter mutters in a low voice,

"Looks like we need a car."

"What?! Ah, sorry!"

Getting a glare from those unique eyes, April, who is crouching down, quickly covers her mouth. It'd be all over if they were discovered by those twenty-over soldiers, so their conversation naturally goes lower in volume.

"Y-you really planned on walking here and back?"

"I feel that was is more inconspicuous."

"...How is that inconspicuous?! That's more conspicuous, I didn't think you operate without any plans~"

Though if he was someone who planned things before carrying them out, then he wouldn't have grabbed the chair and destroyed the exhibit case, and he definitely wouldn't have lost to a woman and a kid back when he attacked the restaurant.

"Geesh, you're hopeless. Over here, come with me, I'll let you hop into my car. Though you have to be mentally prepared for my sarcasm!"

The duo keep their bodies low and cross the tress, coming to a deserted gravel road connecting two buildings. The taxi is waiting on the side on April's orders, slightly slanted on the side of the road, but there are two legs stretching out of the open car door.

In that second, April holds her breath.

"Surely not?"

Deuter comes up to her really quickly, and then gives the driver a slap without holding back.

"Ouch, ouch, that hurts like hell... What was that for, aren't you going too far?"

"Thank goodness, you're still alive! Since you're still alive, send us back to Hotel

Adlon.”

He gets into the car as he says that, and before the groggy driver has even started the engine, he has already closed the car door with a loud ‘pa’. The white Benz makes a reverse quite unlike a high class car would make, and drives away from the museum.

The two of them are plastered against the car windows, staring behind them in case someone comes chasing. Luckily, the one following closely behind them is a private vehicle, and there aren’t any military vehicles in sight. All the way until the moment they pass the university hostel, only then do the two passengers turn around, heave a deep sigh of relief, and sink deep into their seats.

If she wants to confirm it, she has to do it now.

“Hey, that pale arm...”

Deuter, who didn’t show much emotion at first, suddenly starts yelling nervously when his gaze goes downwards,

“What are you doing?!”

“Eh?! What?”

“I’m talking about your feet, your feet! Put on your shoes, quickly!”

She lowers her head and follows his pointed finger, looking at her feet, covered only with silk stockings and bleeding in several places. She had completely forgotten that she had taken off her shoes to hide her footsteps.

“Ah! God! What was I thinking! How could I step on crushed glass without wearing shoes, but then I don’t like wearing high heels... Y-you there, don’t misunderstand! This is my first time making this mistake.”

“Stop talking, just put on your shoes already! Don’t tell me you lose your shoes along the way?”

He mumbles, ‘Why do women like running bare-footed so much,’ as he gets ready to take off his own army boots.

But at that moment April quickly reaches her hand into her jacket, pulling out the high heels she’s so ill-used to wearing.

“You’re really naggy, you know! I don’t need you to be a busybody, I got my shoes with me! Ah—Really, it’s all because you force me to put on my shoes, my feet hurt even more now!”

“I was just wondering why the shape of your chest was so weird.”

“What—I didn’t think that someone who looks as scary as you is actually a pervert, I’ve really misjudged you. Why are men’s eyes always looking over there?”

“...Who asked it to be shoe-sole shaped, I think everyone would notice that. Ah, wait a sec! It’d be bad if there were still glass shards there.”

Having taken off the white gloves, his hands unhesitatingly grab her feet and lift them up.

“Stop! The friend that came with me is a doctor, I’ll just get him to help me treat it in a while!”

“But this way you can’t walk, can you?”

It seems like her joints have cramped up, April makes a short scream of pain.

“Hey, it’s all your fault for smashing the glass before getting to understand the situation! Otherwise I wouldn’t need to have stepped on it either!”

“That is indeed my fault.”

“It was all your fault. Wa—Stop, don’t touch it! I can’t stand you, you really like smashing glass, don’t you! And you’re not a little kid anymore, but you’re still so rash. If you really are dumb enough to think that you just have to break a few windows to make everyone listen to your every order, then you’re making a big mistake! Even I, April Graves, have a principle to not do something as petty as breaking win...Ow, ow.”

“April Graves?”

Her right foot is resting on Deuter’s knee, the handkerchief and white gloves used to bandage it are slowly being dyed red.

“You’re that Graves? The one the Jew called Bapu contacted to get back the Box...”

“That’s right, Ri... Ow, I bit my tongue. Richard Deuter, don’t tell me you never realized who I was all this time?!”

“How could I have realized, and my name isn’t Richard either.”

“What do you mean, ‘How could I have realized.’ No way, I don’t believe you! Didn’t we meet once before in Kou Li’s restaurant?”

“Although you say we met, but that was across an entire street. I didn’t have the luxury of looking closely at someone’s face, now, did I.”

“But I remember you clearly! Richard Deuter.”

“If so, then remember my name correctly! Don’t keep getting it wrong, it feels like you’re doing it on purpose. I’m not called Richard!”

The driver, who finally managed to clear his brain a little, looks into the rearview mirror as usual, and says casually,

“My two customers back there, can I ask you something?”

“What is it?”

“What now?!”

When the impatient duo replies at the same time suddenly, the man is shocked into shrinking into his shoulders.

“...So he really is your long lost lover, after all?”

Deuter let April hold on to his shoulder as they get off the taxi, looking at the front of the hotel with a frown,

“So you’re that guy’s guests?”

“That invigilator keeps sticking to us like a stalker, just looking at him is annoying. Do you know him?”

The shiny blonde-haired, black-uniformed man, Herm Coruna keeps repeating a strange action. One moment “he” would be climbing up and down the stone steps, and the next moment he would stick out his body and stare at the distance. There’s a black Benz waiting at the pick-up spot in front of the entrance, and DT is sitting on top of the bonnet.

The misunderstanding between the two seems to have been resolved.

“Hi, April!”

When DT sees his partner, he immediately starts waving happily and dragging out his sentence, “And I went all the way to the zoo, too~”

Coruna, on his way to confirm that his guest is safe and sound, nearly falls in his haste to get down the stairs. “That’s right, I was worried sick! Young Miss. I got your companion to tell me that you seem to have gone to the zoo... No, I asked him to tell me, and then I immediately rushed there by car, but...”

And the moment he recognizes the person standing next to her, his tone instantly takes on an obvious sense of superiority.

“Oh, dear, what a rare guest. Isn’t this Lieutenant Rikhiart Deuter?”

The two men are of equal rank, and similar age, but Coruna doesn’t seem to think much of the other man. This is the proper attitude towards the driver’s so-called ‘rare person’?

How pointless, what does hair color represent? Besides, men’s hair will all fall off eventually.

“Colonel Hughes is looking for you right now, Lieutenant... Did something happen to your uniform?”

His gaze moves to the shirt held under his arm. If the thing hidden inside is discovered, it’ll be bad.

“Because it got dir...”

“It was me, I splashed him with beer!”

Deuter, looking displeased, hasn’t even finished his sentence before April, leaning on the taxi, decides to butt in and give him an excuse.

“Who asked him to be so rude to me, so I just took a large mug of beer and poured it all over him.”

The blonde SS officer nods hugely three times, showing his absolute approval of this.

Although that being said, there’s another problem there, too.

“This young miss got lost, so I took her to the venue of the auction. After I asked her, she mentioned your honorable name, and I was even more certain this is the right place.”

“Oh~ Young Miss, it’s an honor that you still remember my name... Oh, dear, did you sprain your leg, perchance? How can this be, I’ll find you a doctor right away.”

“It was perhaps because she wore unsuitable shoes, so she got blisters. As for a doctor, it seems that her companion happens to be one, so you don’t have to waste your time. On that note, Coruna, it must be tough babysitting tourists.”

“She’s not a tourist, this young lady here is a VIP at the auction tonight. I am under orders to take care of them until they leave these borders.”

“So that they don’t get a chance to escape, is it?”

“I’m different front Lieutenant Deuter, who can’t go on any important missions.”

Oh, dear! These two don’t seem to get along at all. After all they’re wearing the uniform, even if it’s only on the surface, they should still pretend to be great friends.

Although the truth is she and DT are more or less the same, April is still thinking that secretly in her heart. Her companion, on the other hand, continues to sit on the bonnet, shaking his short legs,

“I say, April, did you see the gorilla? Did you? And who’s that man? Is it lover candidate number one you met on the road?”

The shoulder she’s holding onto twitches a little, it seems like Deuter can understand colloquial English very well too.

“Let me introduce you, DT, this here is Richard Deuter, a man who likes to smash glass more than he likes his three meals a day. The repair fees for the glass windows in Kou Li’s restaurant, you can get them from this SS lieutenant.”

“I accept your billing, but I’m not called Richard.”

The Asian, happy that he got to enjoy the sights at the zoo, shrugs as he says, “Anyway, that’s my wife’s shop.”

“April! Where on earth did you disappear to?!”

“Things got a bit complicated, Regent, and I got a lot of things I want to say and a lot of questions to ask, too.”

“Me too. Who was that officer talking to you just now?”

“Ah, yeah, yeah. This rude soldier here is...”

She sways left and right as she tries to look backwards, only to see the taxi carrying Deuter just about to leave. Holding the arm wrapped in the jacket tightly, he turns back for a glance from the passenger seat. The corners of his lips seem to lift a little as he smiles, it’ll probably be too late for her to catch him now.

“Did he send you back here?”

“No, I was the one who let him tag along.”

Henry Regent, who had rushed out of the hall, politely takes off his panama and holds it under his arm. As for his suit, you can’t quite say it has a gentlemanly feel to it, just looking at those wrinkles anyone can tell he just got off the train, and goodness knows where he walked here from, because even his leather shoes are covered with dust.

“I went to the coffee shop scholars and artists always gather in, gathering all sorts of info on the current situation. But those more mainstream artists were all either captured or escaped out of the country, even the paintings and poems on the walls were confiscated. What on earth is going on with this country?”

The French doctor heaves a lonely sigh, looking forlorn.

“That’s right, Regent, where’s the pivotal Box?”

“About that, according to the local black market traders, all that’s being shown here at the auction are a few sculptures, and everything else is paintings. I guess that the confiscated things are all temporarily gathered here, and their next destination will be determined after the auction... Considering that, the Box may have already been moved to somewhere else.”

“Somewhere else? Where could it be?”

“I think I know where, let’s leave first thing tomorrow morning, then. Eh, what

happened to your foot?”

On the way up the stone steps, Regent helps support her as he continues talking to the two of them. April, on the other hand, feels rather guilty, because she wasn't listening to half of the things he said.

“Since we're only moving tomorrow morning, then let's enjoy the experience of the auction tonight. Did you hear? There seems to be a Lucas Cranach piece on auction tonight! We should help Bob spend some of that money once in a while... April?”

“Eh? Sorry. What did you say we should make Bob do?”

Regent switches his doctor's voice, asking the young patient concernedly,

“Look at your expression, does your foot hurt a lot?”

“Are you talking about me? Regent, what expression do I have now?”

“The expression of a stormy sky about to rain buckets.”

Perhaps.

What on earth has she accomplished today? Her companion was helping her collect intel at a celebrity gathering place, her partner even helped throw off the Nazi invigilator, and bought precious time. But she completely ignored what she was supposed to investigate, and instead she helped the man who should be their enemy. As a result, a precious collection piece was taken away, into the hands of the military with absolutely no appreciation for its artistic value.

And yet—

Taking a deep breath of the fresh air in the large hall; looking up at the red drapes with the ‘卐’ word; avoiding the busy at work, uniformed soldiers, April remembers that touch again.

What on earth is that arm?

Why is the person who took the arm, Rikhiart Deuter, the same man who threatened everybody in Boston?

“Did something happen to make you feel down? April, I can go to the auction myself! Tonight you just get some proper rest in the hotel room.”

April considers it seriously in her heart for five seconds, then she shakes her head and smiles helplessly. That gentle, friendly gentleman's words, are only suited for a cute girl like Dianne.

“Thank you, Regent, but I think I'll attend anyway. I want to see for myself, what atrocious acts that so-called Cultural Division will be up to.”

Right now there's only enough time for her to make up for her failure.

References

1. [↑](#) 'Salonpas', a famous Japanese band-aid brand.
2. [↑](#) Ishtar is a famous Babylonian goddess, and her sign is the lion.
3. [↑](#) 'Frau' means 'Miss' in German.
4. [↑](#) His name is actually 'Richard', but pronounced in the German way. I'm using the pronunciation for his name whenever he uses it or it's stated officially, to differentiate from the way April pronounces it.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 - East Station

Back then they'd forgotten to take the weather into account.

Regent walks back from the hall angrily. Although they had booked the earliest flight last night, but now they've been waiting fruitlessly for four hours.

"I heard they're aborting the flight."

"What, just because the weather's like this?!"

April, who was sitting on the bench and staring at her toes, stands up when she hears the response from the airport management, and at the same time she's surprised at Regent's expression of uncharacteristic panic.

Although the sky is full of grey clouds, the weather in Berlin is like that all-year long. If the plane doesn't fly even on days without rain and thunder, then the days they can actually take off could probably be counted on one hand.

"There was a lady at the boarding counter just now who told me, as the saying goes, 'spring is like a stepfather's expression'. Although it's useless to scold her, but I really wanted to ask if she was purposely making fun of me."

"Eh~"

DT, putting the one large, one small luggage bags down by his feet, suddenly starts yelling.

"So stepfathers in Germany have a lot of mood swings!"

"...You really are, very carefree, aren't you."

Regent picks up his own luggage and extends his hand to April, maybe assuming she needs support to get up. She holds the doctor's hand lightly, but she doesn't borrow his strength. She always feels that this degree of injury, and one caused by her own foolishness at that, shouldn't deserve someone else's help all the time.

Speaking of which, how could she have done something so idiotic? Just

thinking about it makes her feels so embarrassed her face turns red.

“Guess we have no choice, let’s take the train then. Though it will take three times as long, but just wasting about here won’t change the fact that the plane’s not taking off. Besides, we were one step behind the others to start with, so we can’t afford to wait until tomorrow.”

“I thought we can’t get there directly by train?”

“It’s the same if we take the air route, we still have to have the train and a car from Frankfurt. It’d be great if this trip went smoothly, but in any case the worst thing that could happen is we would have to buy a vehicle from a normal family.”

April imagines the image of them riding a horse on the mountain road, feeling like she wants to hold her head and weep. Hoofed animals gave her bad memories once. About five years ago, she was puked on all over by a crazy camel in Egypt...

“...It feels like someone is deliberately blocking us.”

Sitting in the cab, Regent mutters so, and April’s thoughts are suddenly pulled back to the present.

“About that, it’s hardly surprising that I would suspect that. Because the domestic flight to Frankfurt was aborted, but the international flight to Paris went on as usual.”

The only one who knows they’re leaving Berlin should be that Herm ‘Babysitter’ Coruna, but that annoying officer shouldn’t technically know where they’re going. After seeing Regent’s outstanding performance last night, Coruna should assume that he would return to his home country in glory. Because he had desperately bid for a ton of paintings, so much so that even the German auctioneer took a jab at him, saying that he was the destructive collector of the night.

“But every item’s price is really different from it should be, all so ridiculously low.”

Grandmother had taken April to many such events in the past, but she’s never seen such a depressing auction before. Not only did the auctioneer look on foreign bidders, he would even put down the item on auction.

“That really isn’t a smart thing to do. Since they want to earn some extra income, they should praise the items properly to raise the price, it doesn’t matter even if they don’t mean it. But I bid on so many items, from my perspective, it’s only natural that I would want to get home as soon as I can, to receive my reward from my boss.”

“If Coruna knew our true motive, that’d be another matter... Could it be?” April stares at her partner.

“W-what?” The Asian’s straight black hair is billowing up and down.

“DT, you didn’t tell that guy, right?”

“I d-d-d-didn’t, I didn’t, I didn’t, I didn’t, I didn’t!”

“But it seemed to me that yesterday you two got along very well.”

“That’s because you forced me!”

“What did I force you to do?”

“You wanted me to be alone with that dangerous man... Mn...”

Sitting in the front passenger seat, Regent chuckles.

“But we hadn’t decided our destination yesterday afternoon, remember!”

“That’s right, April! Don’t simply say things you don’t know!”

“Then why are you so nervous?”

Actually, the truly nervous one is April, because only she knows the answer.

It’s Deuter.

Rikhiart Deuter knows that their real target isn’t any painting, but the seal of great power, ‘the Mirror’s Depth’. Even though he doesn’t know where we’re headed next, he should still know that as long as we haven’t found the Box and taken it with us, we won’t return to our home country.

At that moment she remembers the feeling on her fingertips back then. That wasn’t plaster, metal or rubber, it felt like a special layer of wax on an animal hide.

Why would he want to deceive the SS he belonged to, and steal that ‘arm’?

“You’re thinking about that officer, aren’t you?”

“...Yeah, that’s right, I always found it strange. Why would the guy who stole the ‘arm’ threaten us in Boston? Think about it, no matter who has the Box, it has nothing to do with that guy, right?”

“About that, there are some things I haven’t explained to you yet, I’ll tell you slowly after we get on the train, by then we’ll have lots of time to talk. On the other hand, you finally called him ‘that guy’, I got a glance at him yesterday, and I thought you guys really got along, too! Didn’t think you disliked him that much—”

That’s because Regent only heard what April told him, so he doesn’t know what kind of a guy Deuter is. He’s expressionless, stuck-up, always thinking that’s he’s so special. Although he stubbornly refuses to believe in anyone else besides himself, he still makes the most basic mistakes like forgetting to plan his getaway. He’s at loggerheads with his own colleagues, but has no intention of making up with them. Always acting like a lone wolf, but tied down by such a nonsensical idea like his ‘ancestor’...

“When you put it like that, I just feel like the two of you are very similar.”

“Me?! Me and Richard?!”

“Richard?”

DT takes this chance to jab her properly.

“What’s this, you only know how to suspect others, but the one really getting along with him isn’t me, it’s you—”

“I’m just saying his name in an easier way!”

“Anyway, before we confirm that he’s not an enemy, we still have to keep our guards up. He may have long since guessed where we’re going, but speaking of where we’re going, is the Box really headed for A... really headed for that place? I’m not too sure myself.”

To prevent the taxi driver from understanding their conversation, the three of them continue conversing in English, but they still have to wary around German place names.

“It’s just that those people eager to open the Box... If they can decipher the words on the decorative parts, then they’d naturally lock down on our destination.”

“So what does it say on there?”

“No idea, since I never stayed in BC Babylon. Though perhaps it’s a record made to warn the world, by people who wanted to open the Box and that door, only to suffer the consequences for it.”

Regent glances at his watch, it’s almost departure time for the train headed to Frankfurt.

“But Bapu had long since deciphered part of it, the part that said the ‘Key’ is ‘pure water’.”

“Mn, I guess the rest of it might be some warning like ‘Don’t open the Box’ or ‘Danger’, I hope the president’s men will go through that important part properly.”

“Pure water...”

April puts her pointer finger on her chin. What she imagines from those two words are springs, river, or melted snow, or maybe holy water in a silver goblet. Oh, yeah, Regent said this isn’t religious.

“Anyway, as long as you know the Box’s true qualities, there’s no need to specifically go decipher those words.”

Hearing the French doctor’s careless words, April grabs the leather passenger seat and says,

“Do you know?!”

“I do, but that memory is very blurred.”

“Then, you know what ‘pure water’ means, too?”

“Of course... Don’t look so determined to get to the bottom of the mystery like that! Look, your eyes are even shining... Okay, okay! I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you!”

Regent held up his hand in surrender, and then said one word.

“Blood.”

“...You said... Blood, whose blood? Since they call it ‘pure water’ ... Don’t tell me they want babies as live sacrifices? Not only is that really religious, it’s cultish!”

“For now, it’s no one’s blood, because it’s a child that doesn’t yet exist in this world. Please don’t ask me what that means. Hey!”

The taxi stops at a place a distance away from the train station. Since there are too many taxis and people around the station, they can’t get any closer.

Standing on the stone ground in the square in front of the station, are tons of people pushing to get out of Berlin.

After that calm Regent yells loudly at the lady behind the ticket counter several times, he finally gets to buy second-class tickets. According to the news he heard, now not only are all the domestic flights cancelled, even half of the international flights were aborted, so all the passengers who planned on taking the air route have flooded to the train station.

“Is that really the only reason?”

Forget the platform, even the café and bar are stuffed full of people, April looks over there, cocking her head in confusion. It’s hard to imagine that there are still so many people taking out their entire families on a non-holiday. Mothers hold babies in their arms, the older children are holding their little siblings’ hands; fathers carry all the luggage they can on their backs, and their arms are full of huge bags.

“It looks like everyone is going on a long holiday.”

“Although I’m not sure if they’re going on holiday or migrating, this is the first time I’ve seen such a chaotic train station.”

“Everyone just wants to escape from here, or get away from Germany as soon as possible, since there’re no flights for them, then the train will have to do. Even if the international flights from Berlin have been cancelled, maybe they can get onto a plane in Frankfurt.”

“Escape? Why would they want to escape from their own country? Don’t tell

me they want to move to a colony?”

The Asian American can't seem to figure out the reason.

They push aside the adults and children apologetically, moving towards the platform headed to Frankfurt. But maybe it's the pressure of the crowd's gaze, but the walk there feels longer than they thought.

“Damn, there's no more time!”

Regent, who was leading, suddenly stops in his tracks, causing April to put unnecessary force on her foot, shooting a flare of pain from yesterday's injury.

“Something happened?”

She looks past his shoulder, and sees that near the already chaotic entrance into the platform, there are several soldiers blocking passengers. They even want to check the children's identities, investigating everybody with utmost caution. But the reason why the passengers haven't rioted in dissatisfaction, is because those soldiers are all fully-armed.

And those people whose tickets were rejected and were forced backwards, are far more than those who actually successfully got onto the train. Those who had tickets but can't get onboard, can only return to the line dejectedly.

“Why a customs check now, of all times?!”

“What is this? It looks like most people can't get on, it can't be that their passport are missing something...”

Just then, a black shadow flits into the corner of her vision. A tall man walks past the two lines, right up to the soldiers, it's the SS uniform that she saw sway too much of yesterday, and there's also the red ‘卐’ armband, and that shiny skull in the middle of the army hat.

He walks towards the soldiers who bowed to him, quick as springs, and then lightly raises the suitcase in his right hand for them to see. In the noisy crowd, his voice rings out crystal clear.

“I want to send this to Colonel Hughes.”

“Please pass, Lieutenant. I apologize for inconveniencing you... May I ask, is that an instrument?”

“Yes, he said he really wanted to play something for the president at the dinner party.”

She remember those shoulders, and the voice is really familiar too, and that suitcase that’s too long for even a trumpet, she knows all too well what’s inside.

Rikhiart Deuter walks past the passengers sitting in a row, headed for the very last cabin. The people watch the SS officer go with hatred and despair in their eyes.

“...April!”

“What is it?”

Regent grabs her upper arm.

“You didn’t hear me? Listen carefully! April, what we’re discussing now is, if the soldiers start picking a fight with us, forcing one of us three to stay behind, then whoever got past first has to get onto the train. The scheduled time for departure is already over, there’s no time to wait for all three of us to get on. As for the ones left behind, they have to catch up immediately, and we’ll meet at Ahrweiler. Understand? I don’t want to waste any more time, even if it’s only one of us, we have to go.”

“You’re right, I know.”

The panicked people start pushing each other around in line, and in no time at all the three of them are separated. Just as they start lining up in order again, the train starts spouting steam. Unsurprising, since departure time was long past.

She holds onto her luggage tightly, holding out her open passport to the soldier. The young man, barely twenty, is evidently flustered by this unfamiliar ID, and tells the man in the next line, probably his superior officer, “This is my first time seeing an American passport.” But maybe because the situation on the other side is a mess too, so he doesn’t even bother to look around.

“Little boy, really, where are your eyes? This is a bona fide passport, you know —If you don’t let me through now, I’ll kick you down, then force my way through, okay--?”

She smiles gracefully, and mumbles in English.

And in the line in front of them, DT has been blocked by an old soldier too. Just as she's trying to check if Regent has gotten through and turns around, she sees that there's one more person before his turn. The doctor frowns, 'tsk'ing his tongue. The train horn blares again, and the train starts moving slowly.

This way, none of them will get to Frankfurt.

Just as she's moving her painful right foot backwards, and getting ready to kick out the young soldier—

“Let me onboard!”

A panicked middle-aged man pushes aside the customs officer and runs forth.

“Let me onboard! My relatives are waiting for me in Kassel!”

That tragic yell is like a trigger, causing people to start rioting. April is continuously pushed forward, until she nearly falls forth. But then the young soldier instinctively steps aside, causing her to lose her balance, and she falls flat on her face onto the cold floor.

Right now, there's no one on either side of her, because she has been pushed out of the line.

“What are you kidding? This is a genuine American passport!”

Someone starts yelling in her familiar English, DT grabs an old soldier at precisely the best moment.

“Look closely, this is the signature from one of the bigwigs in our country! If you think this is fake then why don't you call up our president, he will definitely send a line over to that Little Mustache of yours to show concern!”

He obviously knows that messing around like this won't help, but he still spouts such nonsense. April resists the pain in her foot and stands back up, then this time Regent starts shouting in French. At first she thought he was scolding someone viciously, then he actually starts reading out the human rights. In between his words he adds a quick line, and her feet rush forward with that signal.

“Go!”

April heads for the moving train steps without even looking back, it'd be good

enough if she could just grab that red handrail.

By now the soldiers caught in the riot have started firing, two bullets graze past her left foot. The man behind her who also wants to catch the train instinctively falls backwards, and the woman diagonally behind also falls to her knees, giving up.

I can't stop, now isn't the time to put my hands up and surrender.

Although there's a hot breeze brushing past her face, there's no time to consider what that was. Several gunshots chase after her, but she keeps on telling herself, 'It won't hit.'

April desperately stretches out her right fingers, trying to grab the red handrails, but when she's just one step away, the train starts spewing steam and gaining speed.

She can't reach!

In that second when she feels despair and looks down, she suddenly realizes that the red handrail has disappeared from her sight.

Soon the pain will come back, and then she really won't be able to run.

"Graves!"

She instinctively raises her head, there's someone yanking open the door to the last cabin.

Than man wearing that familiar black uniform, forcefully pulls off his white gloves, and bends his body out of the cabin.

"Give me your hand!"

"Richard?!"

"I'm not called Richard... Why are we still talking about that now?!"

Maybe it's because they saw the officer, so the people behind stop shooting.

April grabs Rikhiart Deuter's hand.

It feels different from that arm.

It's warm.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 - Heading to Frankfurt

Her upper body so bent it's like she's kneeling on the ground, April desperately tries to catch her breath, while the train's rhythmic vibrations are stimulating the wounds on her feet again. Now they're a long distance away from the train station, and DT and Regent aren't onboard either.

What happened to them afterwards? After making such a huge protest, would they be taken away by the soldiers for interrogation?

Whatever.

April closes her eyes slowly.

There's no point in worrying now. Back then they agreed that if anyone was forced to stay, the rest would still get on the train. Neither they nor she was wrong.

"...But... Oh, God, what to do? I left my luggage and passport at the station!"

The SS lieutenant's voice came from above her head, because of the significant difference in their heights.

"Unbelievable. After abandoning your husband to get onto the train, you're more worried about your luggage and passport?"

"That's right, I apologize for not acting professional enough. But still, not all of us get around by stealing a tank or climbing cliff, after all. And besides, when taking an international flight, I can't get to another country without a passport... You said, husband?!"

April is so agitated she forgot that she's still wheezing for air, and straightens up her body.

"Who? Who are you talking about?!"

"That Asian, of..."

"DT? You said DT is my husband?! Unbelievable. Please, do me a favor, stop

joking like that!”

Rikhiart Deuter’s unique, silver-shining eyes are wide as saucers with surprise.

“Don’t tell me it’s the one who was yelling in French? That’s quite a large age difference between you husband and wife. But it doesn’t matter who your husband is, I have a mission to fulfill, I can’t always be taking care of you.”

Deuter puts on his gloves again, and lifts a leather box.

“Wait a sec, hey! Look here, this is empty!”

April stretches her left hand in front of him, so he can confirm for himself that she’s not wearing a wedding ring.

“I have no interest in American culture.”

“That’s not it. Why are you so sure I’m married? Didn’t you just call me an eighteen-year-old kid yesterday?”

“My older sister got married when she was eighteen, though she died when she was 23.”

“Eh... I-I’m so sorry... But I still have to explain it to you clearly! Listen up, DT has a beautiful wife, and a baby on the way! I’m currently single, and I plan on keeping that way for quite some time!”

“Is that so? Because Coruna likes going after married people, that’s why I jumped to conclusions.”

“Eh? That man is interested in married people?”

Crap, what if he really does go after DT? April feels responsible for that, but she immediately forcing her thoughts back to the topic at hand.

“Ah, how did we get so distracted? That’s not right, is it? Richard, you should have other things you want to talk about, right?!”

Deuter raises his right brow, saying in an unrelenting tone before he’s cut off.

“I’m not called Richard...”

“Not that!”

She points at her foot wordlessly, and Deuter’s mouth goes ‘oh, that’s it’.

“You’re talking about your foot? Since you were running so fiercely just now, it should be fine, right?”

“Even if you think so, you should at least ask for courtesy’s sake! How can you been so bad at being human? You were the one who made me hurt my leg in the first place!”

His expression becomes troubled, but after figuring out that April wasn’t going to let him go so easily, he has no choice but to squeeze out the words,

“...So, how’s your foot?”

“Well, at any rate I can run now, so there’s no problem.”

“...Is that so? Then I’m going to the first class carriage.”

“All you have is ‘is that so’?”

“If I say anything else, you’ll just go all upset and say, ‘I’m not a kid any more, please don’t involve yourself with me!’, won’t you?”

“You know me pretty well!”

But his voice goes softer and softer, and he stares out of the window with a creased brow.

“...I’m really glad your foot recovered so quickly, but please don’t push yourself so hard next time...”

“I’m not your girlfriend, can you not involve yourself in my matters so much?”

Deuter puts the box on the ground, and it makes a deep ‘dong’.

“What on earth do you want? Don’t tell me you want me to bow my head and apologize, saying, ‘I shouldn’t have got a little heiress like you who just happened to be at the scene involved’?”

“That’s not what I meant! I’m just purely very angry, angry at myself for running around without wearing shoes, even I don’t know how I made such an unprofessional, embarrassing mistake!”

April realizes that her tightly-gripped fists are shaking unstoppably, and immediately hides them behind her back. And the wound on her large toe is starting to hurt too, so she can only lean on the wall.

“Because that was my first time making that kind of mistake!”

He falls silent for a while. But just as he opens his mouth to speak, he feels needle-sharp gazes on his back and turns around. That’s when he notices that it’s the passengers in the second class coach, looking at the unlikely duo with uneasy gazes, but then they hurriedly look away.

“...Come over here.”

Deuter grabs April’s wrist, walking briskly down the corridor.

“H-hold on a sec! Although I’m really grateful to you for pulling me onboard, but I have no reason to go on a happy vacation with a Nazi. And my ticket is in the second class coach...”

“Please, I’m the one who should be complaining! Who would want to ride with an American heiress?”

At that, he pulls her to his side, saying softly in a dissatisfied voice,

“But just us being here is causing trouble for the other passengers. You saw it too, it wasn’t easy for them to get past those pesky customs, if they see an SS officer in the same coach as them, what do you think they’ll think? And the next stop will be in the heart of Berlin, there will be customs officers ready to take any rings or money off of them, if the customs officers discover a foreigner onboard without permission too, do you know how bad things will get? If that happens, all the passengers will be chased off under the charges of hiding you! The problem is these passengers didn’t help you, they don’t even know how you got onboard, but those soldiers couldn’t care less about all that. Are you okay with silently watching several dozen lives who could have escaped be needlessly sacrificed?!”

“Sacrificed? That’s too cruel...”

Disappointment flashes in those pale brown eyes, and the silver glow from those irises also disappear.

“If it’s the Germany right now, anything is possible.”

Deuter releases her hand, turning his back to her and saying hatefully,

“Although this is such a shameful thing.”

The officer's words ring true. At the next stop there really are a group of lightly-armed soldiers checking every compartment. Through the window, April watches a few unlucky passengers taken off the train, and a lot of luggage is piled up on the platform. Most of it are backpacks and suitcases, very obviously the passengers' personal belongings.

"They're going too far."

"Don't look like you pity them, you have to act like it's only natural."

There are officers coming into the first class coach too, but maybe it's because it's higher than second class, their attitude is a lot more polite. Just then, a young lower-ranked soldier knocks on the door lightly, and walks into their private room, saluting to them expertly.

"I apologize, Lieutenant. May I ask, where are you headed to fulfill your duties?"

Deuter looks at the newspapers and doesn't raise his head.

"I'm sending this to Colonel Hughes in Frankfurt."

"...May I ask what is inside?"

Since the person he is asking is a lieutenant on the SS, his attitude is obviously very humble.

"It's an instrument. Apparently His Excellency the President insists on hearing a musical performance during the dinner party no matter what."

"A performance for His Excellency the President! May I ask if Lieutenant will also be attending the dinner party?"

He doesn't answer, just looks at the lower-ranking soldier.

"It's no noisy outside, what's the ruckus about?"

"It's nothing, Lieutenant, just a standard customs check. Since we can no longer stand the matter of our resources flowing out of the country, starting from last week we've begun checking the customs thoroughly."

"So, that's one of the reasons the air route has been cut off."

“That’s right, because the airport is filled with those rich Jews. It’s one thing if those bastards want to leave, but they even want to take away our Germany’s property. Oh, yes, Lieutenant, we heard that at the starting station a foreigner got boarded without permission...”

Crap, April keeps a low profile lest she be discovered.

“Pardon me for asking, but this woman is...”

“My wife.”

The soldier has looks even more surprised than April.

“You have a wife now! Please pardon my rudeness.”

And then, the man smiles politely, speaking to April shortly in English, but the contents of his question are the complete opposite of his amiable expression, everything that comes out his mouth are derogatory insults that would alarm any woman who understood English.

But she cocks her head wordlessly, asking him back in German, “What are you saying?”

At almost the same time, the lieutenant stands up and grabs the lower-ranked soldier’s collar, even knocking off a button in the process.

“Are you insulting her?!”

“N-no, I swear I didn’t mean to!”

April is stunned into silence at the side, because she has to pretend not to understand English. After pausing for three seconds, she finally walks up to calm them down with an expression of confusion.

“I-I just thought that the missus understood English, so I did that. I apologize profusely, missus lieutenant.”

“Can you use that kind of language when talking to ladies? What kind of education did you receive in the army?! Call your superior officer over! I want to talk to him directly, and have him apologize to my wife!”

“Don’t be like that, honey, it’s okay, I don’t mind, besides, I don’t even understand it, much less feel insulted by it.”



Hearing his wife's advice, the lieutenant waves his hand, and the foolish lower-ranked soldier practically crawls out of the room. After the footsteps disappear into the distance, the two finally give in and start laughing out loud. They roll around laughing, hammering the back of the chair with their fists.

"Y-y-y-you actually said I'm your wife! I got goosebumps all over because of you!"

“You’re one to talk! You’re obviously just a brat, but you still acted so exaggeratedly, there was no need to go all ‘don’t be like that, honey,’ was there? I got the chills down my spine because of you!”

“Did that person really believe what we said?”

“Those young people rarely come into contact with ladies anyway, so even amateurish acting can take them in completely.”

“What, aren’t you pretty young yourself?”

Rikhiart Deuter’s expression suddenly becomes very solemn.

“No, I’m already 27, there’s not much more I can do in the time I have left.”

Just then the train starts spouting steam and shaking, and the wheels start turning with a deep sound. The scenery outside the window is slowly moving too, this time the train is truly leaving Berlin.

“Sit down!”

“You sit down too!”

At the end both of them can only sit down simultaneously. The room for six now has only the two of them, and the atmosphere is filled with an awkward silence. April looks at him, slanting her face slightly.

“This is a suggestion from colleague, my grandmother was still doing this business after she just turned fifty! And you’re only twenty-seven, but you’re already saying there’s not much left you can do, saying something like that is to a disappointment to the parents who gave birth to you!”

“Hazel Graves is my colleague? Stop kidding!”

“True, instead of colleagues, you’re more like arch enemies.”

She looks at the leather case on the seat, there’s definitely no instrument inside.

“We specialize in bringing cultural artifacts back to where they belong. But a robber like you, who wants to take away everything for your own selfish desires... If that in there really is an instrument, then that Colonel Hughes guy can’t be normal either. Why would anyone want to hear a brass pipe performance over

dinner? And if that's a trumpet in there, then it'd be way too big."

"For all you know, this is an oboe... Oh, yeah, is using an instrument as an excuse too far-fetched? Though I'm clarifying now, I didn't take it away out of selfish desires, this was always mine."

That line sounds familiar. That's mine, that's right, the Box belongs to you! April Graves.

Deuter expertly opens the lock, the metallic lock bounces open with a 'pa-chak'. He puts the sturdy leather case on the ground, and flips open the cover, which has brass buttons embedded on the sides.

The pure white arm is lying in the middle of the bright red cloth, even after seeing it for the second time, she still thinks it's a lot like an intricate wax form. Because it's just too pale and too cold, so it's hard to imagine that it's a human arm.

"This is my... This is my ancestor's left arm."

"This really isn't a model?"

"It's not, this is human bone and flesh, made of proteins and fat. It existed in my house long before I was born, though that was something that happened about 150 years ago."

She touches it warily, it's as elastic and cold as it was yesterday.

"But... How can this be possible? How is it preserved? Like specimens are soaked in formaline..."

"It wasn't properly preserved in any way, just kept out of high temperatures, moisture and direct sunlight."

"You're saying that again! Do you think this is pickling cucumbers?"

"It's true. I don't know what kind of spell was put on it, but even though its owner is long dead, and the rest of the body has rotted underground, but only this little thing here remains perfectly preserved to this day, sleeping in the mansion storehouse. And even though its owner is gone, there hasn't been one extra wrinkle on it."

"Its owner? Who's that?"

“A man called Robert Belal, he should be my grandfather’s... grandfather.”

And then he says as though singing, as though he’s reciting a poem.

“A hundred and forty years ago, one night when the moon was high in the sky, a one-armed man fell from the sky. He held his amputated left arm tightly, his whole body soaked with water and blood.”

“What’s that, a Mother Goose fairy tale?”

Although she’s purposely joking, April never suspects Deuter’s words, because anything is possible in this world.

“The only ones who would believe this, are probably me and the Nazis, and the priests.”

“Isn’t that Colonel Hughes person very trustworthy?”

“The Colonel... the colonel, is it...”

Deuter turns his face towards the window, staying silent for a while as he watches the scenery fly by. Maybe he trusts that the other passenger in the car won’t steal the arm, so even though April moves to another seat, he doesn’t look around.

She didn’t see it yesterday because it was covered with a cloth, but today she can even see the forearm completely clearly, and there are two dark grey lines near the shoulder, too. If she looks closely, they’re not solid lines, but instead they’re made of tiny symbols. She can’t tell if they’re words or patterns, those weird shapes aren’t anything she’s seen before.

“What’s written there? Or maybe they’re not words?”

“There are four things in this world that should never be touched.”

The owner of the left arm shrugs his shoulders, explaining, “Actually, it’s not impossible to decipher.”

“What I’m saying is the content, because this was passed down through the generations. Not only that Frenchman, I see that you know about it too. There are four Boxes in this world, with great power sealed within. The Boxes’ names are ‘Wind’s End’, ‘Ends of the Earth’, ‘Mirror’s Depth’ and ‘Inferno on the Tundra’ respectively. Each Box has a Key. Only the correct Key can open it, none

of the others can.”

“But I heard that something similar to the ‘Key’ can force it open... Wait, what does this arm have to do with the Boxes? Don’t tell me this...”

“What are you playing at, Graves, how can you stupidly chase after the Boxes without knowing anything?”

Rikhiart Deuter effortlessly lifts the arm and the red cloth around it with one hand.

“This is one of the four Keys. It’s the first one, and also the easiest to use, or the easiest to be used.”

“...How can this be, wasn’t the Key to the Box pure water...”

She’s starting to get dizzy. The man in front of her is playing with the pale wax form, even comparing it to his left shoulder. No, that’s not any wax form, it’s a nearly a 150-year-old human arm...

“The one that need pure water is ‘Mirror’s Depth’, that’s probably the Box they’re looking for so desperately. This is the Key to another Box, ‘Wind’s End’, but it may be able to open the other Boxes too, that’s why I said it’s the first Key.”

The contrast between the black uniform and the pure white arm, is so jarring it’s ominous.

“In comparison, my arm seems to be thinner. But that’s hardly surprising, the muscles you use when shooting a gun are different from wielding a sword. But if anything happens, just this bit of different can’t guarantee it’ll work.”

“What do you mean, work? Don’t tell me you want to put it work?”

Actually what she wanted to ask was how to use the Key. Deuter gestures to the insides of the leather case with his chin, and after she takes off the cloth on top, she discovers a sturdy sword you only see in medieval museums hidden in the bottom.

“I plan on doing a switch, I want to use that... to cut off my left arm, and replace this arm that hasn’t rotted in 140 years with it.”

“How is that possible...”

“I don’t know if I can pull it off, but right now there’s no other choice. Only the Key and its true wielder can control the power released by the opened Box. Right now, the army has ‘Mirror’s Depth’, and I have in my hands the Key to ‘Wind’s End’... You should have heard that as long as it’s something similar to the matching Key, then it too might be able to force the Box open. In that case, this left arm that feels like a toy, can it close the Box too?”

“Richard!”

“Those guys just want to open that Box, and release the power of evil into this world. They don’t care about the consequences at all, all they want is to increase their strength... As long as I can stop their plan, I don’t mind sacrificing anything. Besides, all it needs is one of my arms, what’s there to lose?”

“Stop talking!”

April grabs the red cloth out of his hands, roughly covering the sheathed sword, shining darkly.

That’s too much! Even if he wants to stop the enemy’s plan, there’s no need to sacrifice his own arm.

“That’s ridiculous, it’s just a Box, is there a need to protect it with your life?”

“It’s not ridiculous at all, it’s the reason I joined the SS, and was forced into wearing this uniform.”

The lieutenant angrily takes off his army hat, and tosses it to the opposite seat.

“I even made myself wear this hateful outfit! I think you Americans might never understand it... The feeling on riding a train that has gone out of control, only the passengers onboard will know it.”

Burying his fingers into his hair, Deuter looks much younger than he did before.

He looks out of the window, while April looks at his profile. The initial impression he gave, expressionless and cold, is already slowly fading away, and now he looks more like a kind, normal young man.

“That’s why you joined the SS?”

“Yes.”

“To stop the train that has gone out of control?”

“That’s right. Although they don’t like the color of my hair and eyes, but at the end I still successfully enlisted. It’s probably because I’m the descendant of the family with the Key, so they want to keep me by their side.”

Although there aren’t any other outsiders here, April still instinctively lowers her voice. Because she wants to ask this man she just met yesterday a question that can’t be simply answered.

“So, you’re planning to betray your country?”

Rikhiart Deuter stops looking out of the window, and move his gaze to his tightly-clenched left fist.

“No. Although I betrayed the Nazis, I never betrayed my country. As long as it’s beneficial to the country, I’ll do anything, get rid of any obstacles. I’m not like you, looking for the Box so you can put it up in a museum for display!”

“It’s not what you think it is!”

Once the atmosphere sinks into silence, the vibrations from the train underneath them feel all the stronger.

April follows her grandmother’s advice, closing her eyes and counting slowly to five. When the train passes by ten tracks, she carefully considers how to deal with this man. Maybe she should use more time, but a little less probably doesn’t matter anyway. Finally, despite the fact that she never found any logical conclusion, she takes a deep breath.

Truth is, sometimes you have to go with your gut.

“That Box is mine, y’know!”

“Is it that old Bapu or something lady who gave it to you?”

“No. My grandmother gave it to Mr Bapu for safekeeping after she found it, and then Hazel Graves chose me to be her heir, so that Box is now my responsibility, I have a duty to get it back!”

Grandmother, surrounded by blue flames, would surely look at April with sad eyes in her dreams, shaking her head and saying, ‘Never touch it.’ Actually April had always know that what her grandmother gave to her, isn’t anything you can

express with numbers. No one can touch that Box, and she can't let anyone touch it.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 - Ahrweiler

After making sure that April got onto the train, DT finally stops his embarrassing actions.

To be honest, he's already pulled out every trick in his book.

As for the other riot on the other side, obviously it's the fight the French doctor started with the soldiers.

He's even reciting poems in a foreign language that's not German, causing the soldiers a lot of headache.

"Doctor--"

He thumbs backwards, signaling 'get out of here now'. The unrelenting citizens, on the other hand, rush to the counter, or squeeze to the ticketing booth and demand a refund.

Fighting for their lives against the oncoming crowd, the two finally squeeze their way out of the line and rendezvous.

"W-what a scary riot."

"Well, of course! After all, a day's delay will plunge them into an even riskier situation, to ensure their own survival, of course they'd try their hardest!"

"Hm? Why would they be in such a rush to leave Berlin? Don't tell me the stock market's crashing?"

Regent laughs as he tears up his second class ticket, it's not like they can get a refund anyway.

"You really are so carefree. No, I'm not surprised, I'm saying that sincerely! I finally understand the reason why Hazel liked you so much."

No matter how you hear it, that sounds sarcastic, but right now DT isn't angry at all.

Actually, after two years being partners with April, he really has become very patient.

But his wife says he's become slower, and he can't actually refute that.

"But is our little heiress there really okay? She was pulled onto the train by a stranger—And it's one of those infamous SS officers! Really, when did she become so laidback?"

"No, DT, at the very least he's no stranger. Didn't we see him yesterday at the hotel? Besides..."

Regent puts on his panama as he weaves through the café swarmed with tourists and their luggage of all sizes.

"...His eyes... those pale brown eyes... that shine oddly, I feel as though I've seen them somewhere before. Is it Boston? Or during the war? If it was during the war, then it shouldn't be him... No, maybe I have to look even further back in time."

"Eh, really? Did we meet him before? Actually I'm really no good with faces."

When it comes to DT's expertise, he can only think of one thing.

"Anyway, we have to catch up as soon as possible. Right now the only possible way is by car, but that will only increase the distance between us. DT, we can't get out of Berlin by taxi!"

DT stops a white car that had just let the passengers off, and sat inside, told the driver shortly "to the nearest airport" and then sat back onto the chair, looking pissed.

"Didn't we just go to the airport? The air route has been blocked, and I didn't know you knew German!"

"German? You're wrong, I don't know one bit of it! For these things you can use the global language! Like you, even you don't know Chinese, you can still name Chinese dishes, right? It's the same principle."

The driver who stops at the red light, reconfirms if they want to go to the airport. Towards DT's almost naggy reply, Regent seems rather impatient.

"But the airplanes have stopped."

“It’ll fly.”

The car heads north and then turns left, slowly leaving the station. This is the opposite direction of the airport.

“The chances that those airplanes waiting at the airport won’t take off is pretty high, sure, but that’s because they’re passenger planes. But the airport has a lot of ‘planes’ that don’t take passengers, not only are the seats hard, but it’s also easy to get airsick on them, sometimes your entire body will be sticking out of the airplane, and sometimes it’s a matter of life and death. And if you’re unlucky, it can only seat two people.”

“You plan on flying it yourself?!”

“Well, of course. Haha, now you know why Hazel liked me so much, huh?”

This man is always losing his arguments with the teenage girl, but for some reason he always seems particularly happy when he’s mentioning her.

“The reason I partnered with her, is not to help her or teach her, that brat doesn’t need these at all. I don’t know what April herself thinks, but from the beginning Hazel always had very high ratings for her granddaughter, and I don’t think there can be a better teacher than Hazel. There’s no one in the world who can teach that kid, so all that’s left is for her to gather experience on her own.”

“Then why did you have to partner up with her? Because she’s underage?”

“As if. One of the reasons is that I’ve long since had a beautiful little wife, so she probably feels I’m safe; and another reason is that.”

DT points at the metal wire fence in the distance, and the sky behind it. There are quite a few small aircrafts parked on the wide cement ground.

“That’s my last resort for escaping. As long as the thing has wings, I can fly it. From gliders to double-engine planes, or fighter planes, As long as you can get me into the cockpit, even passenger planes aren’t a problem to me. But hijacking is out of my expertise, so I never got to fly a passenger plane.”

“Oh~ So you have such an amazing special skill... Wait a sec, that means you’re in charge of flying, and I’m in charge of hijacking?”

The man of the skies puts his hands behind his head and says, relaxed,

“Up to you, the strike zone is really big anyway.”

Something like hijacking, is not Regent’s expertise, either.

“...I think I’ll just settle with the American dollar.”

This is Bob’s expertise, now.

April is rather angry at the way they’re looking for transportation.

At first they planned to wait until morning and then find a car in Koblenz, but they couldn’t find a base or a second-hand car dealer anywhere. Deuter looks surprised at April, who’s sighing, “I shouldn’t have bought a car in Frankfurt.”

“That’s why I can’t stand you rich Americans, you just buy a car whenever you need one? The way you’re going, you’ll end up the king of car kings with several dozen cars.”

Just then Deuter, dressed in the black uniform, walks into a farmer’s house and seems to discuss something with the owner.

From a distance away, April sees the owner finally shake his head dejectedly, and then he hands some silver keys to the invader.

And then a small lorry drives out of a small garage, with paddy still loaded on the back.

“How did you make a deal with him?”

“Deal? There’s no need for anything like that, I just ordered him to hand his vehicle over for military usage.”

“You snatched it?! Unbelievable! You actually did the same thing as those horrible customs officers! My god—As expected of the infamous SS, that’s why I can’t deal with SS officers. You’ll return it after you use it, right? You’ll fill the tank right up before returning it, too, right? I’m saying this now, but borrowing something without returning it is a crime!”

“...You’re very petty for an adventurer.”

They follow the Rhine for around 60 km, passing by many beautiful bridges.

When they pass through Remasen, she’s hooked by the surrounding scenery,

almost forgetting her own mission.

“If you have time to enjoy the river sights, you should use to look out for military vehicles.”

“You’re a real nag, of course I’m looking out. Though if I say a comrade of yours in the same uniform floating down the river, I’ll probably pretend not to notice.”

“Whatever you want, I won’t stop you even if you toss rocks at them... Is the Rhine really that awe-inspiring to you?”

Siting in the passenger seat, April sticks her head out of the window, feeling the cool mountain breeze on her cheeks.

“I’m not awed by the river, and the scenery in America isn’t any worse than Germany’s... but this place has a completely different kind of beauty, I really don’t know how to describe it.”

For example, the scenery of the wide open plains at sunset is really beautiful, but the ancient city dyed orange at twilight is another sort of beauty.

Although she never really considered which kind of beauty she preferred, but just seeing it for the first time, moves her in a way that’s indescribable.

“I just hope something so beautiful won’t be destroyed.”

“Destroyed? By who?”

The American suddenly falls silent, because even she knows the situation in this country isn’t stable.

The river meeting into the Rhine slowly comes into view, and as far as the eyes can see, the hills on both banks are all vineyards.

As for the area behind the vineyard, there’s a stone city wall standing, that’s Ahrweiler. April exclaims,

“It’s my first time seeing such beautiful city walls! Are there really people living in there? It’s not just a tourist spot that opens during the day, is it?”

“...Everyone beyond those walls are common families.”

But the scenery past the city gates isn’t common at all to April.

The old streets are lined with adorable wooden houses, and there are pots of plants at every window.

However, every flag hanging high above the streets has the ‘卐’ sign, it turns out that everyone here supports the dictator.

“God... But why do I feel a bit dizzy?”

“Because these wooden houses are slanted. But, is this worth being so moved about? Aren’t a lot of localized townships like this? What kind of a place do you Americans live in?”

“When you come to America, I’ll give you back those exact same words.”

Just imagining Deuter’s shocked expression when he sees the Texan scenery, April can’t help but giggle to herself.

But the happy tourist times end here.

Because there are five jeeps, hooded lorries, and official black salon cars parked by the city gates.

A couple of guards are yawning, bored, and the two hide in a corner behind the bakery to escape discovery.

“Ahrweiler has been targeted, as expected. When they say ‘pure water’, it’s either here or Donauschingen.”

“Regent was right, after all. He said that to open the Box, those people would definitely come to Ahrweiler.”

“Actually as long as you have a bit of common geological knowledge, anyone can guess that.”

“Well, you thought the same thing they did, too. Ah~ but that smell of food is really very nice.”

“You’re still thinking about breakfast rolls at a time like this?! That’s why I don’t want to partner up with women or brats! If you think this smells good, I suggest you don’t get close to any bakeries in the morning!”

“Stop mentioning anything about good food! And where’s Ahrweiler’s ‘pure water’, anyway? Is it in the church?”

“No.”

After affirming the guards’ equipment, Deuter reaches his hand out for the cargo hold of the small lorry.

He pulls out two guns and an old-looking rifle from the haystack, and tosses the one with the smaller nozzle to April, while she puts the gun into the haystack.

“The spring in Apollinaris was discovered in the vineyard, and fresh water gushes from it to this day. Hey, you had better keep that with you, if we’re attacked, that toy stuffed to your chest isn’t enough!”

“How rude of you! These are my bona fide chests—there’s nothing stuffed there!”

“I see.”

“What the hell are you agreeing for!”

But the spring was only discovered over ninety years ago. Although there’s no way to determine the Box’s year of manufacturing, but it shouldn’t be something so recent.

If the words and symbols were added afterwards, then they can’t deduce the year of manufacturing from that either.

But judging from the state of the metal decay, they can probably deduce the year those parts were added.

“Just those parts added later are already a couple centuries old. Why would a spring that showed up recently be assumed to be the spring? Technically there are older water sources in this world...”

“But the location must be in Germany.”

“Eh?”

“No matter what, it has to be in Germany. An object chosen by God to be holy, cannot exist in any other country, be it the chosen water or person. Sad to say, those are the times we live in.”

Deuter takes out the instrument case, and confirms that the metal lock is

sound. He wouldn't be planning on carrying the 'Key' around, would he?

"Don't you think it'd be better for me to keep it? And Richard, I think those clothes are yours are too eye-catching."

"I'm not called Richard.... Don't tell me you want me to wear that?"

After looking April from top to bottom, Deuter looks at his own official uniform. How can his build fit into a girl's clothes? Defeated by him, April sags her shoulders and says,

"I'm not asking you to exchange clothes with me, I just want to remind you not to be too conspicuous. Hand it here, I think it's best if I take it, at least I can bluff my way in as a tourist."

But unfortunately, April can barely take care of herself as it is.

The two of them safely get past the guard station, without their partnership being discovered.

Normal soldiers don't suspect the SS officer at all, instead they even salute him energetically.

And even if April is only window-shopping without actually buying anything, they don't pay any particular attention to them.

The spring in Apollinaris is situated in the vineyard beyond the city area. The main squadron seems to be already gathered there, because their occupation made the local atmosphere really tense.

Though they all support Hitler, it seems they're not so fond of the SS.

When Deuter walks past in his uniform, people already start whispering in the shops.

If they walked on the road looking all authoritative, surely the locals would feel uncomfortable too. Watching Deuter with his hard expression from a side, April finally understands.

But then a familiar face enters her field of vision.

Actually it's not particularly weird someone in a black uniform saunter around, everyone must be guessing 'So the research on the Box falls under SS jurisdiction

too.’ That blonde hair shining in the afternoon sunlight, in some ways, is just like the uniform, and not special at all.

But as that man approaches, her eyes widen into saucers.

It’s Coruna.

Herm Coruna is walking pompously with his customary confident smile.

“No way? Shouldn’t he be in Berlin?”

Although she really wants to ask his colleague Deuter, she can’t afford to make too much noise.

She tries signaling him when he coincidentally looks her way, but he doesn’t seem to understand at all, just mumbling,

“Something about football?” Not football, it’s Coruna, Co-ru-na, but it’s still useless.

April runs across the road like a little animal, grabbing Deuter’s hand and pulling him into a nearby shop.

Because they are the strange combination of a tourist and a soldier, it would be weird if they went into a souvenir shop to browse around.

Finally they just had to pretend that they were total strangers, standing together and avoiding each other’s gazes.

“Don’t look here! Look forward, keep this stance for now!”

“I didn’t think you would dance that strange dance in public, rather than saying it’s eye-catching, I feel it’s embarrassing.”

“Y-you think I like making those gestures?! Of course not! He’s coming! That guy’s coming!”

“Calm down, who’s ‘that guy’? Little Mustache?”

“Waa! What shocking words! Ah, don’t look there! It’s not, no matter how brazen I am I still wouldn’t call the dictator ‘that guy’. No, it’s that guy! Herm Coruna!”

“Lieutenant Coruna? Why would that man...”

April grabs a nearby handmade souvenir, holding it as though appraising it. It's a nutcracker Hitler, what an unfortunate sign.

As for the slightly chubby male salesperson directly in front of them, he turns his body around, completely ill-at-ease.

"He can't have come in after me, right? What a bother, though I'm still single-"

"He shouldn't have that much free time, right?"

And the response is even more direct.

Coruna arrived earlier than them, which shows that he's on a mission related to the Box.

Since he belongs to the Cultural Department, and was in charge of the art auction, so he's probably tasked with taking care of and moving the items confiscated from the emigrants' hands.

"In that case, 'Mirror's Depth' counts as something under the Cultural Department?"

"Cultural? You're saying that has the recognition of the Cultural Department."

What an impressive title.

"Excuse me, you two, my husband has been scared stiff since just now."

"What?"

The solidly-built lady owner speaks up to the duo, and they raise their heads in unison, seeing that the salesman in front of them has broken out into a cold sweat and curled up into a corner. Crap, they kept staring for too long!

"Ah, no, no! Don't mistake me as someone with him, that'll make me very troubled, he's not my partner at all."

"Is that so? Then I apologize. Because the two of you just happened to stand close to each other, and seemed interested in the same item."

She looks at Deuter's hands, and realizes that he's holding a Hitler nutcracker too, and its coloring scheme is very unique.

An inexplicable sense of duty rises within April, and she feels that she has no

choice but to bluff her way through.

“Really, how could I have confused him with my uncle? But isn’t this man a member of the SS? Of course he would respect and love something like this from the bottom of his heart—”

“Speaking of the SS~”

The completely fearless lady owner talks to her with the relaxed attitude of women conversing.

“Miss, you’re here sightseeing, right? Although you came all this way, I still have to warn you to not approach the spring.”

“Why?”

“Staring from daytime yesterday, there’s been a ton of army squadrons, and they’re building something goodness knows what at the spring. Actually we’re really worried too, if the spring dries up and we can’t make more wine, then we really wouldn’t know what to do. Even if we want to see what’s going on, but they erected tents there so we can’t see a thing. My son did sneak in, though, and he says there’s a dirty wooden box at the bottom of the spring. What are they playing at? Although I don’t know if they’re doing some experiment or ritual, but the military did something so unhygienic, now what are we supposed to do about this year’s wine! I say, Mr Soldier, since you’re in military uniform too, could you help us put in a word, and ask them not to simply mess things up?”

“Ah? Okay.”

The lady owner suddenly directs her words at Deuter, but maybe because he’s not used to interacting with normal people, he jumps in surprise.

As for April, she immediately buys a pair of sunglasses, determining that Coruna had left before she walks onto the street. No matter how you look at her, she’s a suspicious figure.

“Why are you so stupid, how can you act all timid at a time like that? You should have taken out your intimidation skills from that time you stole someone’s car. But at least now we understand the situation a bit more. The Box is here, and those people definitely think that the Apollinaris spring water is the

‘pure water’. They’re sure that the water here is the Key, but the truth is they’re wrong.”

“We have to get the Box back before they try anything wrong. If by any chance they discover the real Key, I alone can’t handle it with my power.”

“Oh, but you’re not alone, are you?”

Deuter’s eyes reveal an intense sense of disappointment.

“I may as well be alone.”

“Don’t you have me?”

“...Not only am I alone, I have a brat pulling me down too... Listen closely, I’ll take this chance to tell you now, even if later we successfully get the Box, I won’t hand it over to you. Even if you say you’re the heir or the owner or whatever, that thing can’t fall into anyone’s hands. If you try to take it to America, I won’t hesitate to open fire and stop you.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t hesitate to counterattack.”

Just then April hears the sound of a jeep and quickly hides behind a sign.

Passing by them is a team of grey uniforms.

“Last time you caused such a scene in Boston, it wouldn’t make a difference if you opened fire on us now, right? But before you attack, please give a word of warning. It’s just that I’m the type of person who gets more worked up when I’m warned.”

Just then she remembers Regent’s advice.

Back then there were a lot of people who wanted it, they were probably willing to pay a lot for it.

This time they must prevent that from happening, and then quickly bury it in a safe place, where no one can misuse it...

“I made a promise.”

If they successfully got back ‘Mirror’s Depth’, she’s going to bury it where no one can find it. That’s something humans must never touch, and must never be allowed to touch.

“And we must use this chance when those people are obsessed about the spring water, to make sure they never find the ‘Key’.”

“What do you mean by that, Graves?”

“Because ‘pure water’ does not mean water, but the blood of a child not yet born into this world.”

“Blood?”

The door must be open with pure water, and only pure water can open it.

Rikhiart Deuter smiles bitterly, his gaze resting on the leather instrument case, then he uses his deep, gentle tone to express sympathy for that child’s fate.

“...What a bloody way of saying it... But then again, if even ‘Wind’s End’s Key is a disgusting left arm that will never rot, it’s no wonder that the Keys to the other Boxes won’t be beautiful or elegant to any extent.”

“Perhaps.”

She can’t help but wonder, scared, what the remaining two Keys are.

After going past the city gates, in the middle of the lush green vineyard not too far away, there’s a huge pale brown canvas, very much like the circus tents she used to watch lions performing in.

There are armed soldiers everywhere, and officers in grey going in and out.

They shouldn’t all be from the Cultural Department, but also the combat team that the land army has a hand in, too.

There’s a truck with the cover removed parked in front of the tent. Unfortunately, the cargo bay is empty.

“Are you trying to sneak in hiding in a place with lax security like this puffy dress?”

“Is that funny? And that’s not a very classy joke.”

April bumps Deuter’s side, changing her tone into one ready for battle.

“Hand me a gun.”

“Didn’t I give one to you just now?”

“I don’t want that kind, I want a machine gun or a rifle.”

“Do you know how to use it? Little kids shouldn’t hold such dangerous...”

She grabs the rifle from Deuter, who continues to mince his words, and then she kneels down, using the empty wine barrel to stabilize the gun.

“I’m already 18, and besides I was already shooting beasts in Alaska way back when I was ten.”

“Who gave you such a scary education!?”

Back then she had shot a huge grizzly bear, apparently it had already killed three people.

Although she didn’t kill it, but when their eyes met, that fellow did definitely say this—it said, ‘Little girl, you’re not bad!’ Though of course it used bear speak.

April carefully takes aim, and then counts to five in her throat.

Once she reaches five, she pulls the trigger, and the next four shots hit all four tires on the truck.

The last fifth shot was aimed for the fuelage, but because she missed, she roughly tsks her tongue, and it takes until the sixth shot to blow a hole. Fuel slowly flows to the panicked soldiers’ feet.

“Unbelievable! I actually missed one!”

“...What kind of education could have created such a scary brat like you...”

They take advantage of the soldiers’ attention on the truck and run to the back of the tent. Not long later, those soldiers will start looking everywhere for the enemy outside. They roll up the waterproof cloth and stick their heads inside, presenting an ugly stance with only the lower half of their bodies sticking out of the tent.

Inside the tent, slightly dim since the sunlight is blocked out, the situation is vastly different from what April imagined.

A thick pipe sticking out from the ground is connected to a huge silver water trough, and there’s even a drainage valve to adjust the amount of water at the end, that’s where the water flows into the tray from.

“That’s the spring water? Why is it completely different from what I imagined —”

“Stop making a fuss, that’s because the bottling factory is still under construction. But even a wet-behind-the-ears brat like you should be able to guess that.”

“Not that, shouldn’t the water flow out from the rocks?”

The duo creep forward, pulling the rest of their bodies inside too, and then they hide behind some building materials, out of sight. There are a few armed soldiers inside, while the other few subordinates are searching the area, and the only officer is wandering around aimlessly. But what’s really surprising to April, is that they actually let more civilians than she thought come in. And just when she was thinking in her mind that a super secret special unit like this would definitely reject any onlookers, then launch their secret plans, too.

“Don’t bother about that first, the most important thing now is to find the Box.”

“Personally I think there’s no need for that.”

Two soldiers are carrying a wooden box over. They seem to want to officer in grey to look at it, but the man doesn’t confirm it particularly, just nods his head lightly.

“It’s a major in the army, could he be the commanding officer here? But that sure is a half-hearted way of dealing with it... But it could also be because he doesn’t know that it has some special powers... What’s the matter with you, Graves?”

“That box is dirty and unassuming, so I’m a little disappointed.”

“...You really dare to say something so disrespectful to God, don’t you.”

What the duo of soldiers brought is just a normal, unremarkable wooden box with a cover. The color of its surface is already black as coal, and the metal sides have rusted too, the size is approximately that of a child’s coffin. If it was a normal grown man, even if he wasn’t particularly strong, he would probably still be able to lift it on his own.

The surrounding crowd suddenly starts a commotion, because the wooden box is placed just near the drainage valve.

April realizes that her tightly-clenched fist is shaking. She's nervous, so much so she thinks that she can hear the agitated heartbeat of Deuter, standing next to her and almost blocking her entire body.

"T-the spring water really isn't the 'Key', right?"

"I should be the one asking that, right?"

The soldiers work hard to open the cover, and a woman nearby makes a sound like a scream.

"W-what do you think you're doing!? How can you simply open the Box like that?"

"Quiet! We just have to destroy the lock to open the cover. There's an indescribable dimension within the Box, should we call it a dimension ... we could also say it's a wall or a door... It feels just like a calm tornado. If we want to calm it down and successfully connect to the dimension within, then we must have the 'Key'."

Although he's talking about connecting special dimensions or whatnot, everyone can only understand his base meaning. If she'd known this would happen, she would have first read Grandmother's favorite Jules Verne's works, though just the pictures on the cover alone had her retreating.

"Have you seen inside the Box?"

"No, never, but I think my ancestor was the person who sealed that power inside. That's the legend that must be passed down through the generations in my family."

The soldiers who peeked inside close the cover with a bang, then cover their mouths and nose with their hands and starts coughing hard, bending their bodies.

Did they see something they shouldn't see? Or is there some mechanism inside that spews poison gas!?

As a result everyone present starts moving towards the exit, including the

soldiers on guard and the officer who seems to be the commander. What an irresponsible team.

“I-it’s okay!”

The poor sacrificial lamb is choked so badly tears are flowing down his cheeks as he waves one hand. Although everyone heaves a sigh of relief, they then immediately look annoyed. Because there’s a stench inside the tent, as though feces were splashed around.

“The air inside is horrible!”

“Ahh—Ai dun wan na assep za boh ahymoa, wha on uth dith ze pewus ower puh ih theh (I don’t want to accept that Box anymore, what on earth did the precious owner put inside?)”

And so there’s an unsure reply.

“...Sir! Is it eggs?”

“Yoh dun hah to ansa sho sewusly (You don’t have to answer so seriously)!”

There are some lower ranked soldiers who couldn’t stand the smell and ran outside for a breath. There’s nothing better than having less enemy soldiers, as long as everyone runs out for a breath like that, they’ll be able to just waltz in and take the Box away. On the condition that she herself must be able to stand that stench, you could even call this a stench-resisting war.

The soldier forced into this unlucky job decides to open the cover again. After the hinge creaks, the innards of the ancient wooden box is finally revealed.

And then, the soldier prepares to push it right underneath the drainage valve. Although his movements are obviously unstable, but maybe he just wants to get it over and done with quickly, so his pushing force is really strong.

But something seems to have gone wrong, because the Box doesn’t change at all, as though the cover was never opened. Even though April knows very well that they’ll never succeed, she still prays silently in her heart.

So the soldier pushes the entirely opened Box right below the place where the water continuously gushes out. And just then—

“Wait! The spring water in Apollonaris isn’t the ‘Key’, y’know.”

Who is it? Who's it with the big mouth?

The entrance to the tent is pulled up dramatically, and the afternoon sunlight beams in directly. A black silhouette is standing with his back against the sun, and he has a little patriot next to him, too. April suddenly wants to hold her head and beat her chest.

"..Can someone strangle that man's neck, please? And put more force into it!"

It's the Lord Blabbermouth, Lieutenant Herm Coruna.

There's also a little kid behind him, whose head can barely reach his waist and looks about ten years old. He's dressed like one of Berlin's famous mini soldiers, so there are young troops who idolize the dictator even in a backwater place like this. His cropped-short, soft blonde hair, and greenish-blue eyes are both very beautiful. When the freckles on his face disappear, he will surely decide to join the SS. He rushes Coruna, his cheeks rosy and his voice childish,

"The real 'Key' isn't the spring water! So even if you put the spring water inside, the great power won't awaken!"

Deuter, who most probably hates kids, is mumbling to himself. And the grey-uniformed soldier who seems to be the commander asks the boy excitedly,

"Then, what do you say the 'Key' is?"

The little patriot in his replica uniform looks even more proud of himself, replying,

"They said the pure water isn't the Apollonaris spring, but a kid's blood or something. They said all that in front of our family shop!"

And then, he uses his thin, fair fingers, to point directly at them.

"Haih~ I'm really very lucky, to be able to see the Box at such a close distance —"

April wriggles her wrist non-stop, talking to the man with his back against hers. She seems to plan on venting her steam on Deuter, because right now she really wants to get that off her chest.

"Isn't that very good? After all, you always wanted to see the real thing from the start, and besides, it's my pleasure to let my Young Lady see it in person."

“What, I didn’t want this kind of a close look! And what do you mean, your pleasure, stop saying things you don’t mean!”

“That should be my line, shouldn’t it? April Graves. Really, nothing good comes out of mixing with kids.”

Deuter is busy wiggling his shoulders, trying to loosen the ropes a bit. Because their hands are tied tightly together, and they’re sitting not far away from the drainage valve and the Box.

“Stop moving! You keep knocking into my shoulder blade, it hurts!”

“You should savor the pain while you’re still alive!”

Looking down at his captives, Herm Coruna’s lips curve into a condescending smile.

“I really can’t imagine how the two of you got together... And Frau Graves, I really am too disappointed in you. I didn’t think that not only didn’t you choose me, but you went and found ‘this freak’. And... God~ And you’re actually still single!”

“That last reason for your disappointment in me, I don’t quite understand it.”

Even though she knows resistance is futile, but trying to escape, April still attempts to speak to Coruna,

“I say, Lieutenant, these ropes are too tight! If you tie us like this the blood circulation will be cut off in no time!”

“I apologize for that part, young miss, but unfortunately not everything has to go your way! Because even though that man back-to-back with you is stupid, he’s also an excellent soldier. If we tied him normally, he’ll break free immediately. After all, whenever we mention Lieutenant Rikhiart Deuter, we know that he’s the man who repeatedly made it out of an impossible situation in the enemy camps in one piece.”

“Then tie me separately from this guy! I’ll introduce DT to you as a token of appreciation.”

“You mean that Asian?”

“That’s right.”

Although it's a little ridiculous to bring this up now, but Coruna really does hesitate for a while.

Deuter curses as he tries to rhythmically twist his left hand.

If he really was an excellent soldier, technically he shouldn't have been subdued so easily.

But back then he was aimed at by everyone present... even the villagers, so he naturally had no other choice than to raise his hands in surrender. She never thought that there would be so many hunters on the street, even if she wants to throw caution to the winds and start a gunfight with the military, she can't bring herself to hurt the innocent uncles and aunties.

"Don't waste your time."

The man whose blonde hair and blue eyes go very well with his black uniform, slowly crosses his arms before his chest.

"Although this might make you very uncomfortable, but please bear with it, just for today. On that note, young miss, you're going to become the first person to be cleansed by the holy water from the Box, such an honor amongst honors has no parallel! You're really lucky, I'm quite jealous of you!"

"Then I'll let you have it."

"Thanks, but no thanks."

April subtly glances at the place where the construction materials are kept.

Good, no one's gone near there yet.

Because she hid the leather case in the crack between the extra reinforced steel bars and the waterproof cloths there.

If in this situation even the arm was taken away, goodness knows how badly Deuter will scold her.

"About that Box..."

The grey-uniformed man who seems to be the commander walks over with the child who caused this tragic ending.

The young boy is proud and excited, his face still rosy as a tomato.

“Just because we said the spring isn’t the Key, you really believe it? The problem is I’m an American who’s never even seen what the Box looks like, and a pampered heiress to boot!”

Deuter mutters, “Now she finally admits it.” Of course, she pretends to hear nothing.

“And you are being played around by someone who doesn’t know anything, isn’t that too far away from your German conservative and practical gaming rules?”

“Young miss, this isn’t football, y’know.”

The man who seems to be the commander grabs April’s chin as he says.

He’s wearing the badge of a major and has no excess fat on his face, making him look like wooden and stony.

And his eyes are sunken too, the people around him probably call him the Major of Death.

“If it’s just an American girl’s words, of course we wouldn’t believe it. Because that would just be a tourist’s joke, we’ll just hope you go back to your country as soon as possible. But if the person you’re talking to is Lieutenant Rikhiart Deuter, then that’s another matter altogether. He’s the only person in this country who own something like the ‘Key’, and that’s also the only reason the President favors him so heavily, even promoting him all the way to Lieutenant in the SS. It’s just very unfortunate, because it looks like the spring water isn’t the Key to ‘Mirror’s Depth’... But since that man believed what you said, then we can’t let this go.”

“I—can’t—stand—you, the truth is he doesn’t think anything of it at all! Right, Richard!”

“I’m not called Richard...”

Until now he’s still wriggling his left arm, unwilling to give up. Her back hurts like hell where his shoulder blades knock into her, why won’t this man just give up already.

“Is that so? Lieutenant Rikhiart Deuter. Oh, yes, Lieutenant, a few days ago

when my subordinates went collect that left arm, he found out that it was stolen by someone the previous night. Although the staff there says it happened at night so he's not sure, but in your heart you should know the answer, right?"

"Really?"

The Major of Death's intimidating gaze fixes on Deuter with his lighter-colored eyes, but his attitude doesn't change.

"Hmph, so that's how it is."

The Major of Death turns around and walks down the pedestal, taking one step away from the Box.

"I had long heard that all of Colonel Hughe's men are arrogant."

Seems like that colonel is as annoying as Deuter.

"Is that team of yours called the Complaints Team?"

April asks her comrade, who's back-to-back with her. Of course he doesn't reply, because even he couldn't care less about the division he belongs to.

The commander hmphs coldly, scrutinizing the drainage valve and the captives in turn, and then he calls the two soldiers who were in charge of carrying the Box over, letting the child in the small size uniform stand in front of the Box.

"All right, young patriot."

The still clueless boy is given a shock when his hands are grabbed by the adults. His face isn't rosy anymore, and his freckles look more obvious because of it.

"Although you are still young, you're already an impressive soldier of the Empire, and you should be able to join His Excellency the President's youth army next year, but we really need your help, and not next year, but right now. How is it? Young patriot, can we ask you to sacrifice your life for His Excellency the President and the Third Empire?"

"That would be my honor!"

The around-ten-year-old boy is so nervous his lips are shaking, and he raises a hand stiffly.

April can't help but look away. What does a child so young know.

The commander nods in satisfaction, and then signals the two soldiers.

“Impressive! Oh, young warrior, we are really too grateful to you. Then, use your blood as the Key to open the Box. When the Box has been successfully opened and become part of or strength, we brothers-in-arms will sing your name in praises, and spread the story of your use down the generations... Okay, do it!”

Deuter continues twisting his body.

Suddenly there's a gun pointed at the boy's temple, making his thin limbs freeze up. Looks like they want the child's blood to flow into the Box, so they plan on blowing his brains out.

“Wait, what the hell are you doing?! You actually want to do something so scary...”

Although she's so surprised she wants to straighten up, but because she's tied together to Deuter, she can't stand up even if she wanted to.

When his shoulders are grabbed and his mouth covered by the soldier's hand, the boy starts to turn pale, sweating in terror.

But the unbelievable part is, there isn't any commotion raised.

It seems like because of the Major and Coruna, the people here to watch the show doesn't know the actual story behind it.

The finger on the trigger moves slightly.

To prevent this inhumane act, April yells on the top of her lungs,

“Even if you do that, it's no use!”

The soldier ready to pull the trigger raises his head in surprise.

“Wait! Just wait a sec! Major of Death, I'll tell you something good, actually I should say that if you don't listen, you might regret it. You hear me? Dig your ears... Sorry, that was rude. Listen carefully! What they mean by 'pure water'~ isn't just the blood of any child! That brat from the Little Mustache pre-army didn't hear us clearly, the truth is, that child hasn't even been born in this world yet. It refers to the blood of a child not yet born into this world!”

“You say a child that hasn't been born into this world?”

The commander frowns slightly, highly doubting if the child she said even exists, his expression clearly suspicious.

And April doesn't give him a chance to interrupt, blabbering on,

"Ah, are you suspecting me?! Never mind, after all it's up to you to believe it or not. But if you look down on it because it came from an American heiress, just be careful not to lose more than you gain! Because heiress is just another one of my identities I'm actually the owner of that Box!"

"Are you staking your claim on it?"

"That's right. Actually I don't have to stake anything, its current owner is me."

"No, that Box was natural property the Jews plotted to take away, it can't possibly belong to an American."

"But the one who entrusted to Jago Bapu for safekeeping is none other than my grandmother."

"Lieutenant!"

Deuter behind her and Coruna in front of her react simultaneously. The onlookers really can't tell which lieutenant the commander is addressing.

"Is this young lady speaking the truth?"

Deuter replies 'Ja', while Coruna replies 'Nein', and the commander clearly accepts Coruna's answer.

"This 'Mirror's Depth is the national property of our Germany. The great power hidden inside this Box, all of it exists for His Excellency the President and our country."

"I share the same opinion, but this young lady's information has piqued my interest. That's why, Lieutenant Coruna, why don't we use this new piece of information as reference as well, and complete the mission of finding the true Key?"

"Yessir!"

The Major of Death shoos the half-dejected young boy to a side, ordering his few subordinates and Coruna,

“Men, she said the Key is the blood of a child not yet born into this world. Do you understand what I mean? If you do, bring it here immediately!”

A borrowing race ensues on the scene.

The soldiers and Coruna jog away from the tent, and return a few minutes later panting for breath, bringing two young women with them.

At first April thought they would bring a baby over, and was ready to give them all the swear words in her arsenal, because if she doesn't do that she won't be able to control her sanity.

Of course, even if things really got to that point, she would do her best to stop them, no matter what she would try to save the baby's life.

Although she hasn't thought of any concrete plans, and her hands are still tied up, but if things got bad, she decides that even if she had to use all her strength to get onto her feet and swing the German tied behind her back, she would still do it to save the child being sacrificed.

But things don't go as she expected, because the young women aren't carrying any babies.

“What is this...”

The major moves his cruel gaze. When he glances at April on the ground, the veins on his bloodshot eyes become even more obvious.

“If ‘pure water’ refers to the blood of a child not yet born into this world... Then does it mean this, young lady?”

One of the women hesitantly reaches her hand to her stomach, and then it finally dawns on April. The other woman one step behind her is heavily pregnant too.

They're both pregnant.

Both of the women are the pregnant mothers-to-be, they're carrying unborn children inside them.

These cruel Nazis want to use the fetuses as the Key to the ‘Mirror's Depth’.

Just thinking about makes her want to puke.

The commander nods proudly at his soldiers, and then gives a simple order, “Cut open their stomachs!”

Everyone present looks like they heard an alien word, and is shocked into stillness.

Finally Coruna is the first person to understand the meaning behind those cruel words, and unsheathes his dark, glistening army sword.

The women aren’t shocked by what’s about to happen, but they scream terrifyingly at the shimmer of steel.

“Stop! You’re wrong, stop! That’s not it...”

April tries to stand up but trips over the loosened ropes and falls to the ground. And the support that was back-to-back against her suddenly disappears, so she’s still tangled by the ropes, falling backwards.

“Richard, where are you going...”

A long and loud gunshot rings out, and one of the soldiers holding down the live sacrifices falls on cue.

April instinctively looks behind her, only to see one of the villagers... a middle-aged man with a stony face holding a hunting rifle.

The smoke rising from the barrel is slowly dissipating.

Maybe he finally realizes the seriousness of the situation, because the man’s shoulders suddenly slump. Just then one of the screaming women stumbles back to her husband’s side.

“...That guy... wanted to... my wife...”

An old man nearby hurriedly presses them both to the ground.

Because all the soldiers who were on guard inside the tent, aim their guns at that man in unison.

“Get down!”

April turns around at the sharp sound from behind her, just in time to see the officer in black kick down the grey uniform, and even take the chance to grab the regulation gun from his waist as he falls.

The gun is pulled out of the holster, and in the shortest distance possible it makes an elegant curve, the safety falling off at the same time, and then he fires one shot at the grey uniform's stomach. Then he aims at the soldier just about to turn around and fire at him, the legs of the soldiers still watching the villagers, and the wrist of the young soldier who's holding the pregnant lady's arm.

Since the interval between each shot is so short, they can't even hear the sound of the cartridge turning.

When all the bullets run out, he grabs the regulation gun from a fallen soldier, and fires another three rounds.

As for the last shot, it penetrates the sword-wielding Coruna's right shoulder.

Deuter's left arm is slumping at an unnatural angle, but just with his right hand he took out all of the German soldiers in the tent.

"Nobody move!"

Maybe it's because of the pain, his teeth are clenched, and he says aiming someone else's gun at the commander rolling on the ground.

"If you value your life throw away your weapons! And those outside, don't come in, or else the next shot won't be aimed at his side!"

Just as April finally frees herself of the ropes, those who were shot are pressing their wounds and crouching on the ground, while the others throw down their weapons.

"Richard, your arm..."

"All the commoners go outside! Graves, are you hurt?"

"No, I'm as lively as ever."

"Good, then you go prepare the car. Listen up, there's no need to purposely buy it with money. Two minutes, get back here immediately within two minutes!"

"Got it."

April rolls up the waterproof cloth, and leaves the way they came in.

Be it the jeep or the lorries, there are soldiers nearby standing guard, and right

now she doesn't have the energy to avoid detection.

Just then, a familiar little lorry suddenly stops not far away from her. The lady owner of the souvenir shop pokes her head out of the driver's seat window, saying,

"I drove it here! This is your car, right?"

"Thanks, but why are you doing this?"

"The one who should be thanking you is me, you people saved my son, didn't you?"

So she's the young patriot's mother.

Upon returning to the tent, Deuter uses his helpless left arm and teeth to pull out the bat-shaped thing from the pile of construction material and tie it tightly. The gun in his right hand is still aimed at the major, though.

"Dynamite?! Where did you get that kind of thing from..."

"I want to load the Box onto the car, can someone help me?"

"I was forced to help, she threatened me!"

The lady owner winks and signals, 'let me do this', because this way, she won't be blamed after all this either.

April helps her lift the Box onto the back of the lorry, and even covers it with hay to disguise, but there's no way to hide that ominous feeling.

"Richard, it's done."

Deuter nods without even turning around, and then he lifts the entire bundle of dynamite. That's a prey even more dangerous than guns.

"Before I count to ninety, none of you are allowed to move, if I find out that any of you have moved before time, then I'll light this thing up and throw it inside."

And then he starts counting while running towards the lorry.

"Graves, give me the instrument case!"

"Got it!"

April picks up the leather instrument case, and even helps Deuter wrap it up in the tent material.

She stops Deuter and then goes around to the driver's seat, getting behind the wheel and practically flying through the town centre.

It's just that her shocking driving and accelerating, raises a protest from the passenger in the passenger seat.

"Don't swing around so much! Or the Box will swing right off!"

"Of course it won't! Can you stop looking down on me? I learned how to drive when I was 16!"

"...That's only two years."

"We should be talking about your arm! What's wrong with your arm!? And there's a lot of cold sweat on your forehead!"

"My arm's dislocated."

"Dislocated... I can't, I can't, just thinking about it makes me want to faint."

So that's how he managed to get free from such tight ropes?

"But pushing the bone back in is even more... Damn, they've caught up."

His shoulder knocking into the lorry car door, Deuter glances at the rearview mirror and tsks. The first bullet scrapes past the car, and the two quickly lower their heads.

"No way, aren't your German ninety seconds way too short!?"

"It could be that they're too stupid, so they only counted to ten."

Now isn't the time for jokes.

The enemy is catching up in two jeeps and a black Benz, the Major of Death and Coruna are surely inside too, and they're relying on their numbers to shoot at them.

Luckily one bullet brushes past between the two, smashing the front and back windshields.

"Damn, Graves, are there any more bullets in the gun?"

“There are.”

Holding the heavy metal weapon, Deuter immediately shoots a few rounds out the back.

The soldier sticking out of the black Benz falls to the ground, and one of the jeeps has its tire punctured, driving into a shop.

The remaining two cars continue to follow them closely at a distance, they plan to use long range guns.

“Are they trying to snipe us with rifles?”

“The reinforcements aren’t here yet? Where are the reinforcements?”

“If we really had reinforcements, I’d have called for them ages ago.”

April spins the steering wheel to the left, shooting past the town gates without slowing down.

Greeting them is the one way road in the vineyard, now they have absolutely no way out.

“That’s too weird. You’re different from us, you should be acting according to military instructions, right? Since you’re acting on that Colonel Hughes’ orders, then you just have to report to your superior officer that you’re in danger and need help, then the colonel should send you reinforcements, right? Not to mention...”

Just then a bullet slices past the air in the car, and they shrink their necks in unison. This bullet was rather dangerous, huh.

“Not to mention, why are you German soldiers fighting amongst each other? Speaking of which, all the problems started with you. At the museum you were hiding from them too, and just now too, not only did you hurt several of them just now, but now you’re starting a gunfight with them? What the hell’s going on? Have you betrayed the German army? That Colonel Hughes, is he the type of commander that doesn’t care if his subordinate betrayed the army?”

“No.”

“Then could it be that to complete a mission that you need to risk your life for, you have to be ready to kill your own comrades in cold blood, and even lose your

own life... Then that's too scary!"

"It's not what you're thinking!"

Deuter groans in pain, pressing against his dislocated left shoulder.

He seems to want to use the pain to hide the huge secret he's going to tell, and finally he can't help it anymore, yelling out in a voice that won't lose to the gunshots,

"The colonel doesn't even exist! From the beginning there was never any person called Colonel Hughes in this world. That's just a fictional character those of us operating in secret within the army created."

April pauses for five seconds, and then says in surprise,

"...What!?"

"Not all the people of this country never doubted the current situation, and not all of them idolize or blindly follow that dictator. There are still people like us who are worried for Germany's future, and want to bring the country back on track. If people in the Party knew about it, we would be executed for treason, but we're still mentally prepared for it, and we're willing to fight to the end for our beliefs. And no matter how big the risk, we have to stop this out-of-control train. Maybe we'll lose our lives for it, maybe our families will be threatened. But even so, even so..."

Rikhiart Deuter looks up into the sky.

"Someone must stand up and stop this country, we can't let everyone become Nazis."

Maybe they noticed we're not shooting back anymore, because the enemy starts closing in on us.

Although April slams down on the accelerator, but the horsepower of a military vehicle and a little old lorry are still different.

Now it's only a matter of time before they caught up, and even if they could successfully escape this car chase, there's no way they can dodge all those bullets. If they're a slightly unlucky, they might even take a hit in the gas tank, and then all they can do is wait for the flames to engulf them and their cargo.

April suddenly remembers her grandmother's dying moments, and smiles softly.

Gramma, I might meet the same fate as you. But her heart is surprisingly peaceful, calm, and the terror is fading away.

"I want to ask you something."

Deuter, with his hand pressed on his shoulder and slumped into his seat, looks up at April's question,

"Just tell me a bit more about the inner workings, what happened to you guys afterwards? How does everyone operate?"

"We split up and infiltrated different organizations and places, like a salon where academicians gather or the financial world, the educational field, of course there are our comrades in the army divisions too. Normally everyone just lives with the same mask, but if something happens that only we can solve, then we won't hesitate to take action. And the best candidate to stop the military from misusing the 'Mirror's Depth' is me. Colonel Hughes is someone created in the files by our comrades hidden in the higher ranks so someone like me can operate easier. As long as I say I'm doing something for the colonel, I can bluff my way past most soldiers, but I have no way of contacting him, because there's no such person, he simply doesn't exist."

"You say he's a fictional character?"

"That's right, so no matter how long we wait, there won't be reinforcements. Even if my comrades know I'm in danger, they can't help me, because we can't let one person's failure pull down anyone else. Although this is very cruel, but they can only stand by and watch. That's how why we made it to this point."

"Unbelievable!"

Deuter's gaze is saying 'why are you still saying things like that at a time like this' as he looks at the driver's side profile. She hits the gas with all she has, and after releasing it for a while, she continues hitting it.

"So that means your heart isn't with the Nazis? You won't salute the Nazis with one hand?"

“That’s right... And that’s why, dead or alive, I’ll always be alone.”

April, in the middle of driving, moves her gaze away from the road for a moment, looking at the depressed Richard as she says,

“Don’t you still have me?”

Richard wipes away his cold sweat with his fist, his face blooming into a rare, cheerful smile.

By now he has no more energy to bother with his dislocated arm, putting all he has into suppressing the urge to laugh.

“Then I’m no different from being al... Watch out!”

Their car is suddenly rammed into, turns out the black Benz was ramming into them from behind.

“Looks like they’ve stopped Operation Shoot Us into a Beehive, now it’s highly likely they’ll want to destroy us together with the car.”

Finally getting his laughter under control, Deuter continues muttering in a stiff voice,

“Graves, carefully slow down.”

“Why? Shouldn’t we put the pedal to the metal and get rid of them?”

“Don’t ask so much, just slow down! And when you get the right chance, jump out, you can do something as trivial as that, right? I’ll take care of the clean-up.”

Because he pulls something rather dangerous out of his jacket, April hurriedly speeds up even more.

“Wait, wait, what do you mean by that? You can’t even drive by yourself and you say you want to take care of cleaning up, don’t tell me you want to blow yourself up with bombs!?”

“I haven’t considered something so final yet, it’s just that I can’t let the Box we worked so hard to get back return to their hands so easily...”

“Have you forgotten? Richard, that Box is mine, y’know!”

Grandmother’s tone may be graceful but it’s also stern, and has a sense of authority that does not allow talking back to. Now, April prays that she’s

inherited Grandmother's way of speaking, and says determinedly,

"I forbid you from blowing it up of your own accord!"

"Even if you say so..."

Just then, there's the sound of something slicing past the air, making both of them fall silent in unison.

Three propellers of different sizes each turn at their own pace. They realize that the sound is chasing up to them from behind, and naturally speed up the little lorry some more.

"Graves, behind us! Watch out behind us! Ah, it's better if you don't turn around! I take back what I just said, put the pedal to the metal! Otherwise we'll be flattened by that plane!"

"Flattened... Could it be DT?"

The reinforcements are descending from the sky.

"It's the reinforcements, Richard! Those are my reinforcements!"

Accompanied by the whirring of blades, the silver plane, flying at super low altitudes, is getting ready to slide into this one way road, and is throwing things at the black Benz and jeep from above. The things fly at the car top with a 'thunk', and just like that the car is squashed.

"April—We're landing, you guys stay away a little!"

Normally in situations like this you can't hear the people on the plane talking, but April thought she could hear it very clearly.

"Hey, why are you going straight into the vineyard!"

She ignores her passenger's protest, daringly slicing her steering wheel towards the vineyard. The silver cargo plane flies past the lorry, gliding long, and finally stops. As for the soldiers afraid of an explosion, they scuttle away from the destroyed Benz and Jeep.

And then, the little lorry ignores the soldiers behind and returns to the road, rushing towards the plane in front. Right now April really wants to meet up with her friends.

DT has one foot on the cargo plane's boarding ladder, waving his hand as he says,

"Hi, April! Did it go smoothly?"

"DT!"

This time even the tears flowed.

Although it was only two days since they met, she really missed his innocent smile and cheerful voice.

"What was that, DT! You just missed one train, what took you so long?"

"Aiya~ Sorry, sorry. Because dealing took a little time, but I found a really good cargo plane--!"

The Asian knocks the silver plane body twice, and holds out his palm at the wide-open cabin door.

"If there's anything you want delivered, please use DT Air Carriers! Even if it's just a Box, we'll send it to your destination on time!"

"You're way too exaggerated, it's just an old wooden box, there's no need to use a bulk carrier plane like this, right?"

Just then, Regent runs out of the plane.

"Hurry, April! Eh? Is that gentleman all right?"

Deuter presses on his helplessly dangling left arm, muttering.

"...Seems like this year's red wine, can only... be reported as 'no harvest'..."

The cargo plane's wings fly horizontally past the vineyard, as though harvesting the Spatburgunder^[1] that has yet to bear fruit.

References

1. [↑](#) A type of grape

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 - Lindau

There are only two roads leading into the island.

Since the other end of the bridge over the water route is connected to the metal train bridge, and the gate has been lowered, there is actually one route they can use.

“If they set an ambush there, things will get dangerous.”

But reality is the exact opposite of what Regent was worried about. This city, quietly awaiting the arrival of the evening, doesn't have any sort of customs at all.

The little island that can be walked around in one hour is known as the ‘Pearl in the Lake’. There are three islands south-east of Bodensee, and Lindau is the city built to connect these three islands. Since Austria and Switzerland are just on the other side of the lake, it used to be easily traversed by boat.

Even those soldiers with their scenery-ruining uniforms seem much more cheerful on this island. There's a relaxed air of a lakeside city here, unlike the killing atmosphere in Berlin.

“This place is so peaceful, so quiet, it makes you feel like the hustle and bustle in the other cities isn't real.”

Sitting on the back of the lorry and watching over the haystack, April unknowingly voices her true thoughts.

“Although their property was confiscated, but the Jews can still leave through the land route and air route. Even if those routes are prohibited and they can't move freely, they will still definitely use this lake as an escape route. Then the country will send people to watch it closely, and this lake won't be able to maintain its beauty.”

“Will something so cruel really happen?”

A shadow flashes across Deuter's silver-shining eyes, and he replies half self-

condescendingly, “If no one comes out to stop it, then it’s highly possible.”

“But I still find it hard to imagine.”

The French doctor who got out of the front passenger seat helps April down as he looks behind him “Why would the pursuers make the wrong deduction? Technically they should easily be able to guess the group who took away the Box, and our destination.”

“It’s actually very simple.”

Dressed as an officer, Deuter brushes the hay off the surface of the Box, and then lightly pats away the bits stuck to his sleeve.

“They probably think that we would fly the cargo plane directly to France, since that’s the simplest way. But they only want to use the Box, so they can’t imagine that we would sink that thing we worked so hard to get into the bottom of the lake. But thankfully for their greed, we’ve bought ourselves some time.”

“Are we really going to sink it? Sinking it to the bottom of the lake, is it really okay?”

Regent nods, looking at an uneasy April,

“That’s why we’re here for, April.”

April touches the part of the cover that’s revealed, moving her fingertip across the decorative parts carved with words and symbols. Sealing it forever before deciphering this part, is that all right?

Actually they have already come to the conclusion of sinking ‘Mirror’s Depth’ into Bodensee, that’s why they came to Lindau.

This Box must never fall into any more evil hands.

To prevent the worst case scenario, the best way is to sink it to the bottom of the lake where no one can reach it.

Regent and Deuter agree on that.

The difference is whether or not to destroy it.

Deuter maintains a soldier’s point of view, and thinks that it’s best to deface it until you can’t see its original shape at all, but according to Regent, destroying it

seems to carry a certain risk.

If that impact accidentally opens the door in the Box, thereby releasing the sealed power...

“The original ‘Key’, which is the owner of the ‘pure water’ hasn’t been born into this world yet, in other words no one can control this power now. If tragedy strikes and everything is engulfed in water, all anyone can do is watch from the side helplessly.

Deuter is convinced by his argument, and decides to just sink it.

As evening approaches, Lindau Harbor is extremely quiet, there’s just the slow orange ripples on the surface of the lake.

After they walk past the old streets and arrive at the old dock, Regent once again speaks up, “Although this time we successfully threw off our pursuers, but this doesn’t mean we’ll never be found. For all we know, they may already have chased us to this vicinity.”

“That I know, that’s why we must get this done as soon as possible. Try to find a speedboat... Ah, never give something like this to Richard to handle, that man will do something those horrible customs officers.”

“How many times do you want me to say it, I’m not called Richard!”

The French doctor pushes his glasses up his nose, interrupted their back-and-forth argument, “It’s not just that, I think we should split up.”

“Split up? But there’s only one Box!”

Deuter ‘mnh’s once, and then turns around to tear down two ‘卐’ banners beside him, borrowing a wooden box from a deserted market and wrapping it up with the red cloth.

As long they wrap up the real Box with cloth as well, they look just like two coffins lined up next to each other.

“Like this the real and the fake are both completed. Although it’ll never stand up to close scrutiny, but from afar it should be impossible to differentiate, then everything should be good to go. Bur, who will take the real Box? Basically we can’t tell which side will be more dangerous...”

“Truth is both are dangerous, let me take the real...”

“I’ll transport the real one.”

DT, annoyed since he was called off the plane, glances at April.

“Because I’m the owner of the Box, Grandma asked me to bury it.”

“Then I’ll go with April...”

“No.”

The heiress’s partner's brows droop unhappily at Regent’s prompt objection.

“What—I am still April’s partner! Even Hazel handed her to me and asked me to take care of her—!”

“Mnh, but this time I think it’s better for her to partner up with Richard. DT, you said so yourself that Hazel handed her granddaughter to you, is precisely because April is still imperfect. Personally I feel that right now what she needs the most isn’t a helicopter pilot that can help her escape, but the true owner of the Key.”

“What?! Richard is the true owner of the Key?”

“Ah, but listen to me, DT, the Key Richard has isn’t the Key to the Box, but the left arm passed down through the generations in Richard’s family.”

“...You guys... are getting it wrong on purpose...”

Finally, April and Deuter ride on the boat with the real Box, while DT and Regent take the one with the normal wooden box.

On the speedboats that weren’t taken by force or bought at a high price, there are cargos wrapped up in cloth with the ‘卐’ sign.

The atmosphere is like that of a child’s funeral.”

Regent unties the hemp rope connected to the old jetty as he asks Deuter casually, “Have I met you somewhere before?”

“...Why? Is this some new pick-up line?”

“No, I’m asking you in all seriousness. I seem to have seen those eyes of yours that shine silver before. If the person I saw wasn’t you, maybe it was your

parents? Have they participated on the front lines in some war?"

"My old man isn't a soldier."

Regent cocks his head suspiciously, making the pose of someone frustrated, and then looks at Deuter's eyes again, this time cutting to the chase.

"Or could you be the descendant of some man from far away?"

"If you're talking about the man who fell from the sky soaking wet, then I had no choice but to be his descendant."

"I see... Then Richard, you are Berard's..."

"This isn't a particularly happy topic of conversation, I personally try to avoid mentioning it."

He shows the expression of someone who doesn't like being interrogated. As the boat quietly leaves the old harbor, the sky and the streets have been dyed red.

Even the Alpines in the distance turn red, and the reflection of the twilight horizon is reflected shakily on the surface of the lake."

April sighs, feeling it deeply. She finally understands a little the feeling of those people who love this land passionately and would sacrifice their lives for their country."

"I think eventually this will become a battlefield too."

"But it's so beautiful here..."

"Although we're desperately trying to prevent that from happening, but we really are forced by the circumstances."

Although he's wearing the uniform of an SS officer, neither his body nor his heart belongs to the Nazis. Those in the minority opposition rarely get the fruits of their efforts, and their fate is more than likely to fail.

"Looks like Hitler will still complete his empire, and be hated by the entire world as a dictator."

"Don't say such despairing stuff!"

April grabs the oars from him, and rows with all her might, closing the distance

in one go.

“I’ll row! After all, your dislocated shoulder has just recovered.”

Deuter just watches her quick and agile movements quietly. The speedboat hasn’t reached the deep waters yet, and April looks around distractedly.

“We probably won’t be heard if we start the engine now?”

“...Ah, that’s right.”

She pulls the oars back into the boat, and then pulls the strong on the motor, but the motor just makes a coughing sound, then it doesn’t budge at all. Then her gaze, looking upwards, suddenly stops.

“...I didn’t think that there’d be a lion statue here too.”

Deuter turns around to follow her gaze, there’s a stone lion on a cliff in the east, sitting firmly on a pedestal about five to six feet tall and looking down.

“That’s a Babylonian lion statue.”

April has an indescribable feeling of reassurance, as though a great weight was lifted off her shoulders. Looks like this is the right place, they can’t go wrong sinking it here.

“If it’s here, maybe it won’t be lonely anymore.”

“What do you mean, lonely? Don’t tell me you’ve grown feelings for the Box?”

That part of soldiers always ruins the mood.

“Because the pictures engraved on the metal part of the Box is a lot like the lion on Ishtar’s door. I was just thinking that if there are two lions, then they shouldn’t be lonely anymore. But thinking about it, that day I actually wanted to see the lion.”

“That should be in the new museum next door, right?”

“That’s right. But if back then I had really gone to see the lion, then I wouldn’t have met Richard.”

“I’m not called Richard...”

Deuter purposely lowers his head and avoids looking at April, hiding his not

unhappy pained smile. He carefully changes positions with April on the boat, and then takes the starter string for the motor.

“Let me start it, if we continue like this it’s no different from a hand-rowed boat, and the other team has started up their motor already, too.”

Looks like he’s really well-versed with this, he just has to pull it once to start it, but the smooth sound of the motor is interrupted by the sound of propellers from the evening horizon.

“Crap, those guys plan on an aerial strike.”

Before Deuter can finish his words, two double-engine scouting plans have appeared.

The sky is quickly becoming dark purple, they can’t tell what kind of plane those are by the shadows alone, but they can be sure that they’ve become the targets.

Because the plane heads towards DT and Regent’s boat, still visible, and even tosses down a detonated bomb.

“DT! Regent!”

The place where her comrades are is replaced by a large upward splash, and for a moment April cannot control herself.

“Is it real? They really deployed the air forces? Their target is just a box, an unassuming normal box! They haven’t even confirmed what kind of shocking power it has, why have even the air forces appeared!?”

“Calm down, Graves! That was a detonated bomb, so they won’t be blown to pieces, after all the enemy still wants to get back the Box. They just plan to blow us upside down before we land, and then take the chance to get the Box back... Wait a sec! Why would those guys be so sure we would pass through Switzerland? Hey, turn off the light! Otherwise we’ll be the best target!”

But the other plane, upon turning back, has discovered April’s boat. Sure enough, it isn’t sure which target to aim for, but maybe because the other plane has started to attack the other ship, it starts heading their way. Even if the bombs won’t explode, but if the boat is directly hit it will still shatter.

Although they haven't been hit yet, with all the ammo luckily landing around the ship, but they had still better take this chance to row the boat to the middle of the lake, and sink the Box as soon as possible.

"Do you think we can make it to the dead center?"

"It's not a matter of can or not, we must. If we simply sink it in the shallow waters, all they have to do is send a hundred divers to look for it, and they'll pull it up in no time."

April stares in the direction where they saw the silhouette of the boat just now, but maybe it's because the sky is getting darker, now they can't see a single boat at all.

"What to do, I can't see them! Are DT and Regent okay!?"

"Do you still have the time to be worried about others? The plane's coming, Graves!"

A metal block falls from the sky and hits the side of the boat, causing it to rock dangerously.

Although the Box that they had fixed firmly beforehand is fine, both April and Deuter are thrown off board. It could be that they splashed water into the boat as they fell, causing the motor to die out with a 'phshh'.

The surroundings are getting darker and murkier, so they can only confirm each other's safety with their voices.

"Are you okay!?"

"I'm fine, it's just that water got into my nose."

"Tsk, you sound relaxed. Hold on tight, I'll push you into the boat."

"There's no need."

"Now isn't the time to be stubborn!"

"I'm not being stubborn. I just think that rather than let me get back onto the boat, why don't we first settle the Box, don't you think? See, another plane is coming, this one even has a really bright spotlight. If we're shone on by that thing, what do you think will happen to us?"

The third plane is equipped with a powerful spotlight that can illuminate large sections of the lake, and it's hovering above the area where DT and Regent were.

Maybe it was attracted by the light, because the plane that just attacked them is flying that way too.

"The way this is going, the place we throw the Box and the whole process of it sinking will be noticed, and then it'll be pulled up real fast. It must not happen, we must avoid that happening at all costs, so we must finish this before that light approaches this place."

Deuter is silent for a few seconds, then he puts his foot on the side of the boat, and pulls his soaking wet body onto the boat.

He throws his fallen army hat far, far away, and tosses the life jacket to April, while he takes off his own heavy, drenched coat.

Having caught the life jacket, April rubs her eyes, bleared by the lake water, with her fist.

She can't see Deuter clearly.

"Graves, listen up! I'm going to cut the rope on the Box now, then I'll kick the rope overboard. Be careful not to get caught in the rope!"

"Got it."

"And then, I'll quickly send this boat into that bright area and blow it up. If you want to see the Nazi symbol on the Box burn, I'll show you."

"You said blow it up? How are you... Lieutenant, don't tell me you never got rid of those explosives!?"

"How could I simply throw away something so dangerous? Graves, you be careful, I'm cutting the rope on the Box now!"

Not long after the sound of fiber being cut, there's the feeling of something large and light being thrown into the water.

At first it was still floating and rocking on the surface, but before long it started sinking just like Regent said, maybe it was the water flowing in from the cracks.

"Richard, it's sunk."

“Very good, now all that’s left is to perform an explosion for you. If we’re lucky the enemy might think that we gave up and blew ourselves up with the Box.”

Just then there’s the rustling sound of a plastic bag, and April knows that Deuter has taken out the explosives.

A match instantly lights up Deuter’s face, the silver light in his eyes twinkling like stars.

After Deuter lights the long fuse, he pulls the string a few times to start the engine.

But since it was practically soaked in the water, the motor refuses to start.

That’s when Deuter stuffs a rectangular leather suitcase at April, holding onto the side of the boat.

“I’ll figure out how to solve this problem. Graves, I’m handing this to you.”

“...This is the left arm! Isn’t it?”

“That’s right. Before a... a suitable person comes for it, I hope you can keep it somewhere where no one with ill intentions can reach it.”

“Who do you mean by ‘a suitable person’?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t ask. Maybe it’s me, maybe it isn’t.”

When he touches April’s hand, he casually mentions something from before.

“How’s your leg? It doesn’t hurt anymore, does it?”

“Why are you mentioning something from so long ago? That recovered ages ago!”

“...That happened just the day before yesterday, April.”

“I say, Richard, if you don’t start the engine now, the fuse will finish burning!”

Deuter replies softly, “That’s true.” And then he pulls the string again.

The sound of the motor isn’t that smooth, but the speedboat does start moving forward slowly.

“Can you swim to Switzerland? I’m sorry I couldn’t carry you onto shore.”

“What are you talking about? Get off the boat, quick! What if it explodes!?”

“No, I can’t get off yet. The speedboat is too unstable, there’s no guarantee the engine won’t suddenly go out. If the fire is extinguished by the waves, then wouldn’t our plan be in vain.

“Richard! I never agreed to such a dangerous plan!”

“The problem is that we’ve always been doing that, Graves, and I’m afraid we’ll have to continue fighting like this from now on.”

“Richard, Lieutenant! The mission was over a long time ago, wasn’t!? Since the situation in Germany is getting worse and worse, why don’t you go to America? Come to America, come back to Boston with me!”

But the speed of the boat falters suddenly.

Deuter throws away the armband signifying his position, and tosses his shirt and tie into the lake too, replying on the top of his voice to the black night, almost as though to himself, “There’s still something I can do in this country!”

April holds out her right hand, and believes that he will take it with his left.

But the boat recovers and starts roaring as it speeds up.

“Richard!”

By the time she habitually counts to five, the enemy plane illuminates a huge ball of flame right underneath it.

Eventually April endures the waves for a while, but she never got that grasp on her cold right hand.

April Graves swims back towards the shore.

At first she is so slow she barely advances, and after she got used to the water, she gradually increases her speed, until she finds herself confident that she can swim to shore.

On the way she nearly sank several times out of exhaustion, but thanks to the life jacket she’s wearing and her own strength of will, together with the buoyancy of the leather suitcase, she managed to avoid drowning.

Before she can embrace her companions waiting on the shore tightly, all she can do is continue swimming on her own.

But the cold weather and her decreasing body temperature, caused her to almost accidentally fall asleep more than once.

When that happened, though, she would have the same dream, and halfway through that dream she would wake up and continue swimming.

She dreamt of herself floating underneath the blue water, hugging someone's left arm.

That left arm was very warm.

Different from the cold, pale arm in the suitcase.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 - 1980, Spring, Boston

“And thanks to those heroes, America won the war—”

The explanation of the exhibit finally ends with Crystal making up the reason for World War II ending.

The last group to come and visit never planned to listen to any explanations from the start. Amongst the twenty visitors, half of them are sliding down the banister as a game, the other half are being distracted by other exhibits.

And the girls, worried about the rain destroying their hairdos, are looking at the heavy rain outside the door and sighing, while a pair of young, developed lovers are indulging in a long kiss, regardless of everyone watching.

All in front of a young female mummy.

Crystal can't help but think something mean, ‘I hope you get cursed—’

The only redhead young man who was listening to her seriously pushes his spectacles up with his pointer finger, asking questions.

In those family friendly movies, there's always a traditional child genius like him.

“But even if Germany used that ‘Box that will cause floods’, America still won't lose. After all, there's an entire sea between America and Germany, so there's as much water as they could need there, right?”

“That's true, but the European continent where Germany and England might have seriously damaged.”

The moment the words leave her mouth, the kid looks at Crystal as though he's looking at pickled cucumbers, “England is an island country! Aren't you a college student? Why don't you know something so basic as that? Geesh, I always thought it sounded like a hoax, but I still made myself hear out the whole thing, and all that time it was just a made-up fantasy story—”

“Y-you said this is a fantasy story...”

“So, this is fake too?”

The child genius points at the exhibit in the glass case. A left arm, so white from the place of amputation all the way to the fingertips that it’s kinda scary, is lying on the middle of a red cloth, and at first glance you might even think it’s part of a plaster statue. But its surface is as smooth as wax, and there are callouses on the palm that wouldn’t be there on a work of art.

“If this is fake...”

But the kid doesn’t finish listening to her before he runs to his companions near the exit.

“You guys, go home once the rain lets up a bit!”

Crystal sighs, taking off her nametag and getting ready to get the keys from the curator.

Another day is over, and today has finally ended.

As usual, the only visitors are groups after groups of elementary school students, and those kids aren’t here out of personal interest either, they’re just here reluctantly because the teachers use visiting a museum as a replacement for detention.

Actually it’s because this is a small museum that’s built in a safe neighborhood and is free to visit, so the local schools use it a lot.

Although she really likes volunteering at the museum, but sometimes she wish she could explain things to adults too.

She looks around the unassuming museum, and decides that next time they’ll put luxurious and shiny golden things on display.

Although doing this might be a bit insulting to the owner, but this place still needs things that can attract the people to come and visit.

“And then?”

The unexpected sound almost causes her to drop the nametag in her hands. She didn’t think that in the museum that seemed empty, there are still visitors.

“How did that story end?”

He points into the glass case.

Water drips off his sleeve, even forming little puddles by his feet.

He pulls aside the wet hair sticking uncomfortably to his forehead with his right hand, revealing light brown eyes.

“...Is the rain outside really that heavy? I'll get you a towel.”

Her voice is so nervous it's shaking slightly.

“It's okay, I just want to hear more of that story.”

“You're not from this country, are you? Why are you visiting Boston? Sightseeing?”

“No, you could say I'm here on a mission or for work.”

The words from his mouth are polite and accurate, without a single hint of an accent.

Although the two are similar in age, but the air radiating off of him is just different somehow.

Not only his words and actions, even the way he grew up must have been something special.

And deducing from the way he said 'mission', maybe he's a soldier from another country.

“I want to know what happened to those people after the Box sank.”

“...Henry Regent died not long after that. Apparently the passenger boat he was riding on as the resident doctor was accidentally blown up by friendly fire, but DT and Kou Li are still alive and well to this day, y'know! They have four kids, six grandkids. Their second daughter insisted on becoming a celebrity, so she ran away from home when she was fifteen and wasn't heard from since... The oldest son and his wife inherited the restaurant, and the younger two live in Boston too. Last year they got great grandkids. Although they're already more than eighty years old, they're still enjoying life playing with their grandkids. I heard that that restaurant is always the most modernly-decorated, and is quite famous

in Chinatown.”

Since the other person looks surprised, Crystal quickly adds,

“Their glass windows are all made of the newest bulletproof glass. Mike, who inherited the place, feels surprised about that, but I heard his parents refused to let up on that no matter what.”

“Then MISS Graves and... that man named Deuter?”

So as not to displease him, Crystal looks at the young man’s eyes discreetly.

But underneath the light of the exhibits, she can’t even determine the color of his irises.

“...April Graves continued her work after that, which is returning things to the place where they belong. But things like those treasures displayed pompously at large museums, or requests for things like the Holy Grail which people worship, she stays far away from them. Ten years ago the Graves Group created this museum, and almost everything here was handled personally by Hazel Graves and her heir, April Graves, but only a few people know that. Although they’re retired, April Graves and Richard Deuter are both healthy and strong. Now they’re in charge of a charity organization, and they fly about here and there every day, busily... Ah~ I can’t stand it anymore, can I ask you a question now?”

He stands with his hands on his waist, tilting his head slightly to make her finish what she has to say.

“Hey, you’re not going to grab a chair and smash the glass case, are you?”

“No, I wouldn’t do something so violent.”

“But, you look just like my grandfather’s pictures from when he was younger.”

“Do we look that similar?”

That’s right, very similar, even those eyes are the same, light brown eyes with irises shining silver.

He narrows those unique eyes, looking at the ‘fake Key’, and then he pulls up his wet fringe again, using perfect textbook and understandable English to say, “I was introduced by someone to give you a job, I hope you can help me retrieve the real ‘Key’, not the reproduction, from a heavily guarded safe.

“But that’s my grandfather’s family...”

Crystal looks at the young man before her, and counts to five deep within her throat. By the time she reaches the end of her count, she has made her decision.

“Okay! Leave it to me, traveler. I’ll definitely bring it back.”

Because April Graves chose her as an heir. Crystal knows, that what Grandmother gave her isn’t something that can be expressed in numbers.

I must fulfill my duty over the Boxes, and return them to the most suitable place and owners.

“But, can you please tell me the whole story? Are you meeting anyone for dinner? If you don’t mind, I’ll introduce you to a trendy restaurant, we can talk slowly there. Start with your name and where you come from.”

That’s right, Grandmother has taught me all the important things.

Including the way to trust people.